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LUTHER AND THE DEADLY BE'S:  
HIS CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING IN CONTRAST TO  
REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL EXCLUSIVISM

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

LUTHER AND THE DEADLY BE'S:  
HIS CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING IN CONTRAST TO  
REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL EXCLUSIVISM

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To Holly:

Your passion, tenacity, and wit rival the reformer.

Your name, not mine, deserves to be on the first page.

'Tis grace hath brought us safe thus far, and grace will lead us home.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>LW</i>	<i>Luther's Works</i>
RHP	Redemptive-historical preaching
RH	Redemptive-historical
WA	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimarer Ausgabe)</i>

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Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?" For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."

Hopson

Louisville, Kentucky

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The advent of redemptive-historical preaching has been, in many respects, a breath of fresh air in the world of evangelical homiletics. Arising from a controversy in the *Gereformeerde Kerken* of the Netherlands in the 1930s and 1940s, the movement began as a debate over the legitimacy of using Bible characters as examples for believers.<sup>1</sup> The school gained traction in America through Edmund Clowney's seminal work, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*.<sup>2</sup> The universal desire of its proponents is to combat the moralistic sermons that for decades have pervaded many pulpits.<sup>3</sup> Daniel Doriani explains this exceptionally well:

Redemptive-historical preaching exalts the God who saves with infinite mercy. It opposes moralizing application, denouncing narrative expositions that focus on human participants as exemplars of good or bad behavior. It cannot tolerate sermons (and hymns) that fail to name and honor Christ, that propound general moral or

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<sup>1</sup>For a helpful overview of the controversy, see Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1970), 22–55.

<sup>2</sup>Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).

<sup>3</sup>E.g., *ibid.*, 78; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 118–19; Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 36; Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 51; Derke Bergsma, "Evaluating Sermons," *Preaching* 9, no. 6 (2000): 25, 28–29; Thomas R. Schreiner, "Preaching and Biblical Theology," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 21; Michael S. Horton, "What Are We Looking for in the Bible? A Plea for Redemptive-Historical Preaching," *Modern Reformation*, June 1996, 5; David Edward Prince, "The Necessity of a Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 133–36.

spiritual instruction that any theist could find agreeable.<sup>4</sup>

### Exclusivistic Leanings

Nevertheless, despite the valuable principles embedded in the redemptive-historical homiletic (also referred to as RH or RHP), a subtle danger is often manifest. Convictional theologians are familiar with the difficulty of passionately clinging to a belief without subsequently resorting to dogmatic exclusivism. Despite their noble desires to promote the value of RHP, many theorists have (perhaps) unwittingly succumbed to fiery overstatements that leave little room for opposing viewpoints. Unfortunately, the predominant tone of most redemptive-historical homileticians is not one of *preference*, but of exclusivity. Even a redemptive-historical argument for homiletical *superiority* would be relatively easy to tolerate. Nevertheless, claims of *exclusivity* pervade the discipline. Nowhere is this exclusivity more evident than in the oft-repeated nomenclature for non-conformist sermons: they are not *sub-optimal* or *sub-par*, but *sub-Christian*.<sup>5</sup>

The concern here is not redemptive-historical preaching *per se*, but the exclusivity of the discipline. As RH critic J. Douma argues, “Not one of us is opposed to the redemptive-historical method as such; what we object to is the *exclusive* redemptive-

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<sup>4</sup>Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 296. Cf. Bryan Chapell who states, “A message that merely advocates morality and compassion remains sub-Christian even if the preacher can prove that the Bible demands such behaviors. . . . By themselves, moral maxims and advocacy of ethical conduct fall short of the requirements of biblical preaching.” Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 274.

<sup>5</sup>E.g., Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 273–74; Prince, “Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Expository Preaching,” 42; See also, Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 83; Donald N. Bastian, *The Pastor’s First Love: And Other Essays on a High and Holy Calling* (Toronto: BPS Books, 2013), 125–126; Jay Adams, “The Proper Use of Biblical Theology in Preaching,” *Institute for Nouthetic Studies*, November 7, 2014, <http://www.nouthetic.org/blog/?p=7030>; Wayne Christensen, “The Hermeneutical Key: Jesus,” *Fox Lake Community Church*, December 22, 2013, <http://foxlakechurch.org/the-hermeneutical-key-jesus/>.

historical method.”<sup>6</sup> Few would undermine the value of the redemptive-historical contribution to homiletics, particularly as it relates to the necessity and practice of preaching Christ. At issue is the exclusivist claims of the discipline and the subsequent name-calling of those who fail to comply with its recommendations.<sup>7</sup>

A redemptive-historical rebuttal would likely suggest that exclusivism is inevitable, since the homiletic is intrinsically incompatible with other approaches, such as exemplaristic preaching. As Sidney Greidanus explains, "in *theory* the dilemma is: either exclusive redemptive-historical interpretation and preaching or a combination of redemptive-historical and exemplary; in *practice*: either exclusive redemptive-historical preaching (barring lapses) or the combination which often leads to exclusive exemplary preaching."<sup>8</sup> In the minds of some RH purists, any compromise with alternative approaches is to forfeit RHP entirely.

Nevertheless, an alleged incompatibility with other homiletical theories does not necessarily warrant the "sub-Christian" epithet. Establishing redemptive-historical preaching as an all-or-nothing homiletic and reducing alternative approaches to sub-Christian status are two separate endeavors. Nevertheless, many in the RH school affirm the former and assume the latter, a feat that seems achievable only through a conflation of RHP and genuine Christian preaching.

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<sup>6</sup>As quoted in Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 45.

<sup>7</sup>In addition to the sub-Christian moniker, alternative approaches are variously called "legalistic" (Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 326), "moralistic," (Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 78), "atomistic" (Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 289), "godless" (Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 119), "Christ-denying" (*ibid.*, 124), "demonic" (*ibid.*), "anti-Christian" (Prince, "Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Expository Preaching," 132), and "tool[s] of satanic deception" (*ibid.*).

<sup>8</sup>Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 47. Emphasis original.

## The Inevitable Impact

Moreover, castigating non-conformist approaches as “sub-Christian” may inadvertently cast a dark shadow on nearly two millennia of Christian homiletics. A careful study of the array of redemptive-historical literature yields an overwhelming list of guidelines for the aspiring Christ-centered preacher.<sup>9</sup> Preachers must identify the fallen condition focus.<sup>10</sup> They must not ignore the eschatological kingdom focus of the text.<sup>11</sup> They must explicitly mention Jesus' name at least once<sup>12</sup> (preferably before the sermon's conclusion),<sup>13</sup> but they dare not think that merely mentioning Christ's name is enough.<sup>14</sup> They must utilize apostolic hermeneutics.<sup>15</sup> They must avoid preaching imperatives without reminding hearers that (1) they are powerless to obey them (2) their obedience does not merit God's favor, (3) their obedience should be in response to Christ's

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<sup>9</sup>Few would contest the wisdom in these guidelines; at issue is whether it is essential to do all this in every single sermon.

<sup>10</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 48–54.

<sup>11</sup>Prince, “Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Expository Preaching,” 100.

<sup>12</sup>Prince maintains, “It is impossible for a Christian preacher to preach a Christ-centered sermon without specifically mentioning Jesus because all legitimate biblical interpretation and application is mediated through Christ” (ibid.). A sermon can speak of sin, redemption, and judgment, and say true things yet still be “sub-Christian” because “without mentioning Jesus, this is not a Christian sermon” (ibid., 101). Cf. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 115–16.

<sup>13</sup>Clowney laments the presence of so much “twisted and bungled preaching” in which “the name of Christ is not named except toward the end in an applicatory conclusion.” Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 74.

<sup>14</sup>Glenn LaRue maintains that a Christ-centered sermon must do more than merely preach about Jesus. “A sermon may discuss Jesus while not really highlighting the nature of his salvation.” Glenn Raymond LaRue, “Weighing Sermon Substance: Evaluating a Sermon’s Degree of Expository Merit, Doctrinal Essence, and Christ-Centeredness” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 84–87; Chapell also states, “The aroma of the atonement and/or the perfume of gracious provision must permeate a message for it to be truly pleasing to God and edifying for his people. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 303.

<sup>15</sup>Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*.

obedience, and/or (4) Christ has already obeyed perfectly on their behalf.<sup>16</sup> They must filter all their application through the lens of the gospel.<sup>17</sup> They must avoid preaching the characters in Scripture as heroes.<sup>18</sup> They must position the text within its redemptive-historical context.<sup>19</sup> This onslaught of homiletical red tape has grown so thick that some redemptive-historical proponents are now claiming that other scholars within the movement are not Christ-centered enough.<sup>20</sup> With such a high standard for genuine Christian preaching, one wonders how many faithful men of God throughout church history would endure rebuke for an abundance of sub-Christian preaching.

Although the renewed emphasis on preaching Christ is a wonderful thing, its manifestation among many RHP disciples may bring more shackles than Shalom. The ever-growing list of sermonic components that must characterize a truly Christian sermon could threaten the creation of a homiletical *intelligentsia*. Has preaching Christ always been this complicated? If not, homileticians must ask themselves if they have unwittingly become guards, rather than guides, turning their well-meaning preferences into a

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 274; Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 118–19; Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 234.

<sup>17</sup>"A biblical passage explicated and then applied to the hearers does not constitute a biblical sermon if the application is made without reference to the person and work of Christ." Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 118–19.

<sup>18</sup>Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 82–84; Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 289–90; Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 34–36.

<sup>19</sup>"Preachers who ignore the history of redemption in their preaching are ignoring the witness of the Holy Spirit to Jesus in all the Scriptures." Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 10. Cf. Albert Mohler, who says, "[Preachers] must take the particular text and place it within the larger story of Scripture." R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 96.

<sup>20</sup>For instance, David Prince argues that many of the most reputable and respected redemptive-historical scholars are not sufficiently Christ-centered because they lack an eschatological focus. Prince, "Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Expository Preaching," 99.

shibboleth for homiletical orthodoxy.

A careful analysis of countless sermons throughout church history would undoubtedly yield a plethora of so-called “sub-Christian” sermons. Has Christ's church really suffered for so long under so much paltry preaching? Perhaps some have so narrowed the playing field that many faithful men of God are no longer fit to be on the team. Perhaps the deficiency lies more in the modern fences that mark the redemptive-historical Promised Land than the saints who remain on the other side. Perhaps in a just zeal for preaching Christ many have succumbed to a chronological snobbery that derides those who preach Christ in seemingly less sophisticated ways.

### **Martin Luther as Corrective**

If any of history's preachers can survive the redemptive-historical gauntlet unscathed, surely Martin Luther would be among them. Luther's reputation as a stalwart proponent of Christ-centered preaching makes him an ideal candidate to test the compatibility of RHP with historical homiletics. It was he who encouraged pastors to “Preach nothing but Jesus Christ and of faith in him.”<sup>21</sup> The homiletical landscape is full of similar quotes and anecdotes attesting to the reformer's radical Christ-centeredness.

Luther is also an ideal candidate because he considered himself a Christ-centered preacher. In the last sermon he preached, he summed up his views on preaching with two parallel truths. First, he believed that preaching should be expository. He states, “Right preachers should diligently and faithfully teach only the word of God and seek only his honor and praise.”<sup>22</sup> Second, preaching should be Christ-centered. He explains, “None other should be preached or taught except the Son of God alone.”<sup>23</sup> Similar

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<sup>21</sup>Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils*, vol. 2, ed. Eugene F. A. Klug, trans. Eugene F. A. Klug et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 185.

<sup>22</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 388.

<sup>23</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 388.

statements pervade his work because Luther viewed true preaching to be Christ-centered preaching.<sup>24</sup>

After briefly surveying Luther's preaching, Sidney Greidanus concluded that although Luther's desire to preach Christ was laudable, redemptive-historical preachers should avoid much in his technique.<sup>25</sup> Greidanus explained that Luther's approach to preaching Christ often went beyond even what those within the redemptive-historical movement would commend. In other words, Luther was so committed to preaching Christ that he often employed hermeneutical and homiletical techniques that some RHP advocates would find objectionable. Nevertheless, despite Luther's excessive Christocentrism, a careful examination of his actual preaching reveals a clear and consistent failure to comply with key redemptive-historical tenets. If one consistently applies redemptive-historical guidelines to Luther's preaching, even he cannot escape the category of sub-Christian preacher.

### **Sub-Christian Sermons**

By what criteria is Luther's preaching not up to redemptive-historical snuff? After all, redemptive-historical preaching is not a monolithic movement, as has already been suggested above; some variation exists among RH scholars regarding what constitutes a sub-Christian sermon. Nevertheless, Bryan Chapell offers a succinct and well-tested summary of sub-Christian sermons from a redemptive-historical perspective in his important work *Christ-Centered Preaching*.<sup>26</sup> Chapell explains, "Messages that are not Christ-centered (i.e., not redemptively focused) inevitably become human-centered,

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<sup>24</sup>The issue here is how one defines genuine Christ-centered preaching. This dissertation will demonstrate that Luther's understanding of Christ-centered preaching is broader than that upheld by many proponents of redemptive-historical preaching.

<sup>25</sup>Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 124–26.

<sup>26</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 288–95.

even though the drift most frequently occurs among evangelical preachers."<sup>27</sup> These messages often have a unifying theme: "they exhort believers to strive to 'be' something in order to be loved by God."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, he aptly labels these nonredemptive sermons as "The Deadly Be's."

The first type of nonredemptive message is a "Be Like" sermon. Chapell explains, "'Be like' messages focus the attention of listeners on the accomplishments of a particular biblical character. The second type of nonredemptive sermon encourages hearers to "Be Good." These sermons make compelling biblical arguments for Christian obedience, but they ultimately focus on "behaviors alone."<sup>29</sup> The third type of nonredemptive sermon urges listeners to "Be Disciplined." These messages are similar to "Be Good" sermons, but are distinct in their exhortations that believers "improve their relationship with God through more diligent use of the means of grace."<sup>30</sup>

These three types of nonredemptive sermons result in "a faith indistinguishable from that of morally conscientious Muslims, Unitarians, Buddhists, or Hindus."<sup>31</sup> Chapell admits that Scripture is replete with "be" messages, but they are indiscernible apart from their redemptive context. In other words, "*Be' messages are not wrong in themselves; they are wrong messages by themselves.*"<sup>32</sup> In other words, Chapell is not against preaching imperatives or morals *per se*. His concern is not the *inclusion* of moral

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<sup>27</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 288.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 289. Chapell's concern is well warranted. Any sermon that promotes a theology of earning God's love through works cannot rightly be called evangelical. Therefore, Chapell's concerns may reflect a subtle straw man fallacy, since the strongest critics of RHP would also reject the notion that believers can do anything in order to be loved by God.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 291.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 292.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 294.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid. Emphasis original.

imperatives in preaching, but the *exclusion* of gospel caveats to qualify those imperatives.<sup>33</sup>

Chapell's "Deadly Be's" are particularly helpful for the purposes of this dissertation for two reasons. First, they offer the most succinct summary of nonredemptive, or "sub-Christian," sermons. Although most RHP theorists do not employ Chapell's nomenclature, their writings present a scholarly consensus in opposition to the same nonredemptive concepts. Second, they are helpful because they represent the position of a redemptive-historical moderate. Chapell rightly avoids much of the extreme language prevalent among many of his counterparts. Testing Luther's preaching against Chapell's "Deadly Be's" will hopefully deliver a more careful and balanced approach to RHP. For these reasons and more, Chapell is a suitable proxy for redemptive-historical preaching.

### **Thesis**

This dissertation contends that Martin Luther's preaching fails to satisfy redemptive-historical standards for Christ-centered preaching, thereby suggesting those standards may be too narrow. Nevertheless, the goal of this dissertation is not to belittle popular homiletical theories, but to suggest a more inclusive alternative. To that end, the law-gospel paradigm in Luther's Christ-centered homiletic may function as a corrective to the potential overreach among redemptive-historical exclusivists. In other words, a careful look at the reformer's homiletical practice may suggest a more comprehensive way to preach Christ, vindicating many preachers heretofore labeled as "sub-Christian."

Demonstrating this thesis occurs in five primary phases. First, this dissertation explains and illustrates the exclusivistic tendencies of Redemptive-historical preaching.

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<sup>33</sup>“There are many ‘be’ messages in Scripture, but they always reside in a redemptive context. Since we cannot be anything that God would approve of apart from his sanctifying mercy and power, grace must permeate any exhortation for biblical behavior.” Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 294.

Second, it establishes the relevance of Martin Luther's preaching to correct this imbalance. Third, it explores the reformer's Christ-centered methodology. Fourth, it analyzes his homiletical practice in three successive periods of his life. Finally, because the goal of this dissertation is not to tear down but to build up, it summarizes the lessons learned from Luther's law-gospel paradigm in hopes to move towards a broader methodology for Christ-centered preaching. Here Luther's role as a potential corrective is highlighted in order to demonstrate his practical relevance for modern pulpits, particularly in his preaching of the law.

### Methodology

Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks in undergirding this thesis was the selection and analysis of Luther's preaching. Richard Lischer's lament is telling: "Exhaustive studies of Martin Luther's preaching are few, and for good reason. The persistence of his scribes has resulted in a corpus of more than 2,000 sermons."<sup>34</sup> As a result, exhaustive studies of Luther's preaching are virtually non-existent.<sup>35</sup> Although this dissertation does not purport to offer an exhaustive study of Luther's preaching, a

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<sup>34</sup>Richard Lischer, "Luther and Contemporary Preaching: Narrative and Anthropology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983): 487; Fred Meuser puts at 2300 the number that have been preserved. Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 18.

<sup>35</sup>In 1967, A. Skevington Wood lamented the absence of a definitive work on the preaching of Martin Luther. A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word: Martin Luther: Doctor of Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Paternoster Press, 1969), 85. At that time, "No exhaustive monograph on this subject ha[d] yet been presented, not even in Germany." John Doberstein agrees: "No full-scale monograph on Luther the preacher has yet been written in any language." *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), xi. Fred Meuser echoes these concerns: "Literature on Luther the preacher is virtually non-existent in English," and "In no language is there a definitive book on Luther the preacher." Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 10. Meuser's own work is limited, despite its status as arguably the most comprehensive study of Luther's preaching in English. In 2012, Carl Trueman also expressed a continued need for study of Luther the preacher. Carl Trueman, "Theological and Biographical Foundations" (Gheens Lecture presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, September 11, 2012).

carefully selected sample of his sermons provides a sufficient basis to establish the above thesis.

Luther's sermons come in many forms. He considered many of his treatises to be sermons. John Doberstein explains, "His treatises on Trading and Usury, the Ban, the Estate of Marriage, and War Against the Turk are essentially sermons."<sup>36</sup> His *postils* are sermonic commentaries, designed to serve as preaching aids to "common pastors and people."<sup>37</sup> Benjamin Mayes explains, "In 1526 Luther suggested that less-capable preachers could occasionally recite one of his postils as their own sermon, though in 1543 he did not want preachers to use postils as a crutch for their own laziness."<sup>38</sup> His catechisms are sermonic, based on actual preaching. His lectures are also sermonic; Martin Brecht states, "As far as theological content is concerned, there is no significant difference between the sermon series and his lectures."<sup>39</sup> Few explain this phenomenon better than does Fred Meuser:

To be honest, one would have to say that almost everything Luther did was preaching. We divide his works into categories such as academic, theological, sermonic, devotional, pastoral, catechetical, and polemic—and there are significant differences between them in approach, intent, content, and style. But these differences are not nearly as sharp as we might assume. His lectures were never technical or objective, no matter how precise his treatment of a word or how incisive his analysis of a theological issue. Always he aimed at the heart as well as the mind of a student. He felt he had not dealt responsibly with any text, in classroom or pulpit, if the hearer's understanding and personal appropriation had not been deepened and strengthened.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Doberstein, *LW*, 51: xiii.

<sup>37</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 75, *Church Postil I*, ed. Benjamin T.G. Mayes and James L. Langebartels (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2013), xxiv.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, xxiv–xxv; See also, Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 60, *Prefaces II*, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2011), 285.

<sup>39</sup>Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532-1546*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 284.

<sup>40</sup>Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 38–39. John Doberstein similarly summarizes, "everything that Luther wrote could be called preaching." *LW*, 51: xiii.

Therefore, it is justifiable to expand an analysis on Luther's preaching beyond sermons *per se*. The law-gospel paradigm in Luther's actual recorded sermons is manifest in his postils, lectures, and treatises as well. Nevertheless, this dissertation is fundamentally concerned with Luther in the pulpit. Therefore, this study restricts its analyses to sermons actually preached by the reformer.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Luther believed that the law-gospel distinction was primarily a difference in *speaking*; therefore, his sermons can uniquely uncover the proper application of law and gospel.<sup>42</sup>

Luther preached in German, and many of his sermons are not available in English. Nevertheless, hundreds of Luther's sermons are available in *Luther's Works* (*LW*), the English translation of the *Weimarer Ausgabe* (*WA*). The reliance on *LW* admittedly limits this dissertation, though not consequentially. The sixty-three volumes in *LW*—seventeen of which contain sermons—offer a reliable scholarly translation with ample material to observe Luther's preaching practices.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the over two hundred sermons available in *LW* are too numerous and diverse (in genre, date, text, and sermon type) to be qualitatively different from the material available in *WA*.

### **Sermon Selection**

It is widely recognized that Luther's theology matured with age. This is particularly true of his understanding of law, which peaked after the antinomian controversies around 1538. Accordingly, this dissertation strives to present a balanced view of Luther's preaching by featuring sermons from all periods of his theological

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<sup>41</sup>The same limitations apply to the additional sermons analyzed in appendix 2.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Gerhard O. Forde, "Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic," *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 240.

<sup>43</sup>The portion of volumes containing sermons in *LW*, is relatively comparable to the selection in *WA*. The latter is comprised of 121 volumes in quarto format, including 32 volumes with sermons.

career.<sup>44</sup> This allows one to trace developments and consistencies in the reformer's preaching. Furthermore, this dissertation analyzes sermons from multiple contexts and biblical genres, including law, poetry, prophecy, gospels, narrative, epistles, and apocalyptic literature. The aim of this diversity is to present as thorough a grasp of Luther's preaching as possible.

### **Sermon Analysis**

The analysis of Luther's sermons includes four main components. First, it begins with a *contextual analysis* in order to set the sermon in its historical and theological context. Mark Jones correctly notes, "His writings, even more so perhaps than the writings of any other figure in church history, must be historically located. Context, in the case of statements made by Luther, is half the interpretation!"<sup>45</sup> The same is true of Luther's sermons. To assist in the contextual analysis of Luther's preaching this study employs a chronological ordering in an effort to trace Luther's development over time.

Second, it features a *textual analysis* of the sermon in order to elucidate the sermon's main emphases. This section explains the sermon text, Luther's outline, and any noteworthy material necessary to present the primary thrust of the sermon.

Third, a *rhetorical analysis* observes Luther's use of the classical canons of *inventio* and *dispositio*. Exploring Luther's use of *inventio* holds much promise for the student of redemptive-historical preaching. Is it possible to preach Christ in an exemplaristic sermon? Are unqualified imperatives incompatible with gospel preaching? Observing what Luther includes (and omits) in his attempts to preach Christ from all of

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<sup>44</sup>Following the example of Martin Brecht in his magisterial three-volume biography of Luther, the three primary periods of Luther's life are as follows: (1) The early Luther (1483-1521), (2) Luther in mid-career (1521-1532), and (3) The mature Luther (1532-1546).

<sup>45</sup>Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 5.

Scripture may help to answer these questions and more. Of particular note is how he employs the law in each sermon. Analyzing Luther's *dispositio* of law and gospel reveals their strategic function in his sermons. Redemptive-historical advocates often suggest that the order of the two is always fixed. Furthermore, it is widely understood that preachers must never communicate the law in isolation from the gospel, implying that gospel caveats should regular piggyback the proclamation of law. A careful analysis of arrangement in the sermons analyzed herein reveals Luther's own pulpit practices.

Finally, a *redemptive-historical analysis* explores Luther's inclusion (or lack thereof) of the "Deadly Be's" in his preaching. In keeping with Chapell's explanation, this section not only observes Luther's inclusion of exemplaristic, prescriptive, and exhortative motifs in his preaching, but honestly assesses Luther's attempts to taper those comments by qualifying them with the gospel. Furthermore, this analysis demonstrates Luther's law-gospel paradigm as his central method for effectively preaching Christ.

CHAPTER 2  
THE EXCLUSIVISTIC LEANINGS OF REDEMPTIVE-  
HISTORICAL PREACHING

The controversy that spawned redemptive-historical preaching began in the Dutch Reformed church in the early twentieth century. It started with the writings of Klaas Schilder—often called the father of the redemptive-historical approach—that often expressed distaste for the exemplaristic use of Scripture. He wrote,

Here and there we still encounter Lenten sermons in which the figures around Christ receive the primary attention. There is talk of Judas, Peter, Pilate, Herod, the Sanhedrin, Mary, etc. . . . (their inner conflict, their comfort, their hardening hearts), while the first and foremost question is forgotten, namely, what *Christ* has done, what *God* has let his Son experience, and what the *Son* has experienced in and through the actions of those figures around him.<sup>1</sup>

The writings of Schilder led to a fiery controversy, ultimately resulting in a schism in the Dutch church. However, upon the advent of the Second World War the controversy eventually faded. Sidney Greidanus explains, “We speak of the fade-out of the controversy rather than its end inasmuch as the latter might suggest an abrupt end, the issues resolved, a peace treaty signed. Such was not the case: no consensus was ever reached, and even to this day the issues at stake keep cropping up here and there.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite the fade-out in the Netherlands, the controversy soon reached American soil. Due largely to the influence of Edmund Clowney at Westminster Seminary, the tenets of redemptive-historical preaching were widely circulated to reformed preachers in America. In 1970, Sidney Greidanus published *Sola Scriptura*, an

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<sup>1</sup>As quoted in Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1970), 109.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 50.

extensive analysis of the redemptive-historical controversy. He followed this work in 1988 with *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, a homiletics guidebook written from a redemptive-historical perspective. In 1994, Bryan Chapell first published his *Christ-Centered Preaching*, a moderate approach to RHP. That work has become a staple in seminary classrooms, has spawned a second edition, and most recently a companion volume. A host of other works followed Chapell's original contribution, such as Greidanus' *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* in 1999, Graeme Goldsworthy's *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* in 2000, Clowney's *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* in 2003, and Dennis Johnson's *Him We Proclaim* in 2007.

In addition, preachers like Tim Keller, Mark Driscoll, Matt Chandler, Russell Moore, and others have popularized their brands of Christ-centered preaching to a new generation of hearers. The result is a general sense (especially among younger evangelicals) that redemptive-historical preaching is the preferred model. What is often lacking, however, is a clear understanding of the core tenets of the approach.

### **Fundamental Pillars**

As the homiletic matured, redemptive-historical preaching became definable more by what it values than merely the moralism it opposes. Jason Allen outlines six pillars upon which the discipline rests.<sup>3</sup> The first pillar is a Christ-centered biblical theology. Allen explains, "Of all approaches to preaching, the redemptive-historical method uniquely depends upon the wedding of a Christ-centered biblical theology with homiletics."<sup>4</sup> Biblical theology, Geerhardus Vos explains, is "that branch of exegetical theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the

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<sup>3</sup>Jason Keith Allen, "The Christ-Centered Homiletics of Edmund Clowney and Sidney Greidanus in Contrast with the Human Author-Centered Hermeneutics of Walter Kaiser" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 5–11.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 5.

Bible.”<sup>5</sup> The RH homiletic tethers itself to biblical theology so closely that the Dutch have described the link as “bicycling through the Bible.”<sup>6</sup> Clowney agrees, “Preachers who ignore the history of redemption in their preaching are ignoring the witness of the Holy Spirit to Jesus in all the Scriptures.”<sup>7</sup>

The second pillar is the conviction that the entire Bible points to Jesus. Allen explains, “Redemptive-historical preaching asserts that the Bible is replete with prescriptive and descriptive accounts that make the injunction to preach Christ from all of Scripture, including the Old Testament, binding.”<sup>8</sup> A cursory glance at popular RH titles demonstrates this claim: *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*,<sup>9</sup> *Christ-Centered Preaching*,<sup>10</sup> *Christ-Centered Sermons*,<sup>11</sup> *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*,<sup>12</sup> *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*,<sup>13</sup> *Him We Proclaim*,<sup>14</sup> and *Jesus on Every*

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<sup>5</sup>Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 5.

<sup>6</sup>John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 115.

<sup>7</sup>Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 10. Cf. David Prince, who says, “One fully exposes the meaning of the text only in light of the biblical storyline.” David Edward Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 161.

<sup>8</sup>Allen, “Christ-Centered Homiletics,” 5–6.

<sup>9</sup>Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>10</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>11</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Sermons: Models of Redemptive Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

<sup>12</sup>Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*.

<sup>13</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

<sup>14</sup>Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the*

Page,<sup>15</sup> among others.

The third pillar of RHP is progressive revelation. God revealed the truth of Scripture progressively; therefore, locating Christ in any particular text requires an understanding of what Vos describes as “the historic progressiveness of the revelation process.”<sup>16</sup> Truly grasping this concept protects the sermon against mere “timeless principles in abstract.”<sup>17</sup> Yes, the Bible teems with timeless principles, but they are not in abstract; the preacher must understand them in relation to progressive revelation. As Greidanus helpfully explains,

The Bible is not an assortment of similar parts (verses) which, like pizza, can be dished out at random; rather, each text must be understood in its own historical context and in the light of God’s progressive revelation before it can be proclaimed as God’s authoritative word for contemporary congregations.<sup>18</sup>

The fourth pillar is the conviction that revelation is the story of redemption.

Allen explains,

Revelation is not just a rambling account of God’s intermittent acts in human history. Rather, the Bible is a master-narrative whereby from Genesis to Revelation, God discloses his redemptive storyline. This redemptive story ebbs and flows with poignancy, tension, and clarity, but through the Bible, it remains the consistent theme of revelation.<sup>19</sup>

This story of redemption reaches its climax in Christ; therefore, the sermon should grasp the big picture and point its hearers towards Christ.

The fifth pillar is the principle of biblical continuity. Contrary to conventional

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*Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007).

<sup>15</sup>David Murray, *Jesus on Every Page: 10 Simple Ways to Seek and Find Christ in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013).

<sup>16</sup>Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 5.

<sup>17</sup>Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 22.

<sup>18</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 72.

<sup>19</sup>Allen, “Christ-Centered Homiletics,” 8.

wisdom that distinguishes between “the God of the Old Testament” and that of the New, RH theorists correctly uphold the unity of Scripture. As Clowney asserts, “Biblical theology is a contradiction in terms unless the Bible presents a consistent message.”<sup>20</sup> Goldsworthy similarly contends, “The unity of the Bible is [a] matter of revelation, not of empirical investigation. Put simply, I believe that the Bible gives me a single, accurate, and coherent picture of reality principally because Jesus tells me that it does.”<sup>21</sup>

The sixth pillar is a twofold homiletical necessity. First, the preacher must proclaim Christ as the focal point of the Bible. Goldsworthy explains, “That the Bible is first and foremost about God as he reveals himself in Jesus Christ means that the preacher must be absolutely scrupulous in making this clear.”<sup>22</sup> Second, the preacher must preach “the whole story of Scripture from every passage and in every sermon.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, preaching any text of Scripture without bringing the redemptive storyline of Scripture to bear is to rip the passage from its context. Dennis Johnson explains,

To preach the whole Bible as Christian Scripture means to take the context of the whole canon into account as we proclaim any text—not only the Scriptures already extant when a particular passage was given, but also those given in subsequent epochs of redemptive history.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps a seventh pillar is in order: redemptive-historical preaching has a heightened emphasis on the individual sermon. The above six pillars are not guidelines that should inform the preacher in his *pulpit ministry*, but essential components of *every* sermon in *every* circumstance. As Goldsworthy explains, “if we do not *constantly, in every sermon*, show the link between the Spirit’s work in us to Christ’s work for us, we

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<sup>20</sup>Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 13.

<sup>21</sup>Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 23.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 60–61.

<sup>23</sup>Allen, “Christ-Centered Homiletics,” 10.

<sup>24</sup>Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 241.

will distort the message and send people away with a natural theology of salvation by works."<sup>25</sup> In other words, in each individual sermon event, the preacher must present both the *center* and *telos* of Scripture. A strict application of these principles suggests it is inappropriate for the preacher to develop gospel concepts over time in consecutive sermons. If this is a fair reading, the Christian sermon is a now-or-never, do-or-die mandate to proclaim Christ the gospel, and the storyline of Scripture.

### Why So Deadly?

These seven pillars of redemptive-historical preaching are the necessary framework for rightly understanding why Chapell's "Deadly Be's" are so deadly. The first type of nonredemptive message is a "Be Like" sermon. Chapell explains, "'Be like' messages focus the attention of listeners on the accomplishments of a particular biblical character. After identifying the exemplary characteristics of the character, the preacher exhorts listeners to *be like* that person in some commendable aspect of his or her personality or practice."<sup>26</sup> Chapell elucidates five chief problems with this type of sermon, often referred to as *exemplaristic preaching*. First, it often fails to address the foibles of the examples in Scripture.<sup>27</sup> Second, it urges hearers to model their lives after

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<sup>25</sup>Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 237. Emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 289. Emphasis original. Chapell seems to omit the reality of *negative* examples in Scripture. By including an honest assessment of the negative examples in Scripture, Chapell's first two concerns with exemplaristic preaching as outlined above would be amply addressed. Other RHP advocates express an equal resistance to negative examples, but Chapell is silent. Cf. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 50. Interestingly, Chapell seems to employ negative exemplars in a sermon on Gideon. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Sermons*, 41-56.

<sup>27</sup>"A difficulty with much biographical preaching, however, is that it typically fails to honor the care that the Bible also takes to tarnish almost every patriarch or saint within its pages. Neither do we help others by encouraging them to be like Jesus if we do not simultaneously remind them that his standards are always beyond them, apart from his enabling grace." Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 290.

examples that did not (or would not) ask for emulation.<sup>28</sup> Third, exemplaristic preaching neglects to show grace as the source of godliness in the example's life.<sup>29</sup> Fourth, it forgets that "grace cannot be self-stimulated or self-sustained."<sup>30</sup> Fifth, exemplaristic preaching is deadly because it disregards the role of grace alone in justifying the sinner before God.<sup>31</sup>

The second type of nonredemptive sermon encourages hearers to "Be Good." These sermons make compelling biblical arguments for Christian obedience, but they ultimately focus on "behaviors alone."<sup>32</sup> Hermeneutically, their chief deficiency is not what they say, but what they omit—imperatives are untethered from indicatives. Chapell mentions five primary problems with this type of sermon, herein referred to as *prescriptive preaching*. First, it causes hearers to assume they can earn a right relationship with God by works.<sup>33</sup> Second, it destroys Christian distinctives resulting in mere moralism.<sup>34</sup> Third, prescriptive preaching undermines sanctification by suggesting

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<sup>28</sup>“Were we to ask David whom believers should emulate, can we imagine that his answer would be “Me”? If even the biblical characters themselves would not exhort us to model our lives after theirs, then we cannot remain faithful to Scripture and simply command a congregation to be like them.” Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 290.

<sup>29</sup>“Before we preach on such [exemplaristic] passages, we must be sure to identify the source of the character quality that Scripture commends. Since the sources of any holy trait is God’s grace, we must echo the biblical caution, ‘Where then is boasting?’” Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>“Since empowering grace is entirely of God, its fruit offers no personal merit in terms of justifying us before God. Simply telling people to imitate godliness in another person without reminding them that true holiness must come from dependence on God will force them either to despair of spiritual transformation or to deny its need.” Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>“Righteous standards become spiritually deadly when they are perceived or honored as the basis of God’s acceptance. Preachers should teach God’s people to esteem and emulate the righteous actions of godly people in the Bible, but preachers must also make it plain that such godliness can come only as a response to God’s unconditional love and as a result of his enabling Spirit.” Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 291.

<sup>33</sup>“When the focus of a sermon becomes a moralistic ‘Don’t smoke or chew or go with those who do’ (or even a more sophisticated ‘Renew your heart by doing what God commands’), listeners will most likely assume that they can secure or renew their relationship with God through proper behaviors.” Ibid.

obedience is essential to maintain salvation.<sup>35</sup> Fourth, it distorts God's very nature by implying he ties his love to obedience.<sup>36</sup> Fifth, prescriptive preaching diminishes the true reason for obedience—not duty, but delight.<sup>37</sup>

The third type of nonredemptive sermon urges listeners to "Be Disciplined." These messages are similar to "Be Good" sermons, but are distinct in their exhortations that believers "improve their relationship with God through more diligent use of the means of grace."<sup>38</sup> This type of preaching exhorts Christians to try harder. Chapell mentions three primary problems with this type of sermon, herein referred to as *exhortative preaching*. First, it blurs the truth about God, turning Him into "the ogre in the sky who requires the daily satisfaction of our toil to dispense his favor or restrain his displeasure."<sup>39</sup> Second, exhortative preaching often insists on godly perseverance in isolation from the grace that creates and sustains it.<sup>40</sup> Third, it mars the believer's

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<sup>34</sup>“Preaching of this sort sounds biblical because the Bible can be quoted at length to support the exhortations. As it runs its course, however, such preaching destroys all Christian distinctives.” Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 291.

<sup>35</sup>“Evangelical preaching that implies we are saved by grace but kept by our obedience not only undermines the work of God in sanctification.” Ibid., 290.

<sup>36</sup>“ . . . but ultimately casts doubt on the nature of God (i.e., he loves us only when we are good enough) and thus makes salvation itself suspect when we honestly assess our imperfections.” Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>“If God were to make his love conditional on our goodness, then we might obey him, but we would not like him very much. The consequence would be that both love for God and true obedience would be destroyed, since only those who love him really do what he commands. Preaching applications should readily and vigorously exhort obedience to God’s commands, but such exhortations should be based primarily on responding in love to God’s grace, not trying to gain or maintain it.” Ibid., 292.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>“The warping of faith and preaching occurs, however, with the belief that disciplines ward off God’s ire or buy his favor. In such a case, the problem is not the biblical discipline we practice but the type of God we perceive. He becomes the ogre in the sky who requires the daily satisfaction of our toil to dispense his favor or restrain his displeasure.” Ibid., 293.

<sup>40</sup>“Few preachers intentionally paint this picture of a God so readily vexed, but when they present the Christian disciplines *in isolation from the grace that motivates,*

assurance, causing some to view God's love as something earned by disciplined perseverance.<sup>41</sup>

Chapell admits that Scripture is replete with "be" messages, but preachers should position them within their redemptive context. In other words, "*Be' messages are not wrong in themselves; they are wrong messages by themselves.*"<sup>42</sup> These sermons often feature "flawless exegesis," but their deadliness appears in an atomistic tendency to exegete a portion of Scripture that is too narrow.<sup>43</sup> In so doing, they neglect the RH pillars of biblical theology, progressive revelation, redemptive storyline, and the homiletical necessity to proclaim that overarching story.

Exemplaristic sermons are deadly because they neglect the RH pillar that Jesus, not a subpar exemplar, is the only hero of Scripture. Prescriptive sermons are deadly because they neglect to present fully the redemptive storyline of Scripture, failing to remind the hearer that the imperatives proceed from the indicatives. Exhortative sermons are deadly because they make the disciplined Christian, not Jesus, the focal point of Scripture. Furthermore, these sermons once again neglect the homiletical necessity to position the imperatives within the redemptive storyline of the Bible.

Ultimately, these three types of preaching are deadly because they reject the heightened emphasis of the individual sermon. The problem is more with chronology than content. In other words, all three types of nonredemptive sermons fail the

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*sanctifies, and secures, such a portrait necessarily emerges.*" Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 293. Emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup>"Through disciplines, we inhale more deeply the air that God provides for the Christian race, but such disciplines do not produce or maintain the oxygen of God's love. Preachers should encourage more prayer, stewardship, study, and fellowship not to manufacture blessing but so that believers can experience more fully the benefits of union with Christ that God freely offers." Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 294. Emphasis original.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 289.

redemptive-historical litmus test because they attempt to stretch into multiple sermons what the preacher must squeeze into one. A wholly orthodox pastor who rightly recognizes the indicative-imperative relationship (as well as the proper fuel and motivation for obedience) is nevertheless a sub-Christian preacher if he neglects to "clearly" and "constantly" connect imperatives to the gospel.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Redemptive-Historical Consensus**

It is no question that Chapell is committed to the “Deadly Be” concept. His nomenclature has survived two editions of *Christ-Centered Preaching* and reappears in the 2013 companion volume, *Christ-Centered Sermons*:

No one can serve God apart from Christ. A message full of imperatives (e.g., “be like [a commendable Bible character]”; “be good [by adopting these moral behaviors]”; “be disciplined [by diligence in these practices]”) but devoid of grace is antithetical to the gospel. These “be messages” are not wrong *in* themselves; but *by* themselves they are spiritually deadly because they imply that we make or break our relationship with God by our works.<sup>45</sup>

However, is it accurate to present this understanding of nonredemptive sermons as equally shared by other proponents of redemptive-historical preaching? Although other theorists do not universally adopt the vocabulary, they share a resistance to these types of sermons.

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<sup>44</sup>For example, Goldsworthy argues, “To say what we should be or do and not link it with a *clear exposition* of what God has done about our failure to be or do perfectly as he wills is to reject the grace of God and to lead people to lust after self-help and self-improvement in a way that, to call a spade a spade, is godless.” Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 119. Emphasis added. Cf. “We can preach our hearts out on texts about what we ought to be, what makes a mature church, or what the Holy Spirit wants to do in our lives, but if we do not *constantly, in every sermon*, show the link between the Spirit’s work in us to Christ’s work for us, we will distort the message and send people away with a natural theology of salvation by works.” Ibid, 237. Emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Sermons*, xxiii. Furthermore, Chapell repeated the concept in his 1996 Mullins Lectures at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, although he then referred to them as “Killer Be’s.” Bryan Chapell, “Living Acorns and Killer Be’s—The Grace Focus of All Scripture” (Mullins Lectures presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, October 2, 1996).

## Exemplaristic Preaching

As mentioned above, the redemptive-historical homiletic grew out of a controversy regarding exemplaristic preaching. Therefore, it is unsurprising to find a lingering disapproval of exemplarism in RHP circles today. Disapprobation for “Be Like” sermons is not restricted to Chapell’s writings alone, but is widely held by redemptive-historical supporters.

Edmund Clowney articulates, “Without insight into the theological horizon of the period concerned, we will fall into thin moralizing which misses the progress of redemptive history and fails to see Christ in the midst. Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac will be only the supreme testing of a great man’s faith.”<sup>46</sup> Clowney has a unique take on the exemplaristic issue. While most of his counterparts highlight the blemishes of Old Testament examples, Clowney is content to point out their *good* deeds that would embarrass the modern Christian. “Surely we cannot pattern our daily conduct on that of Samuel as he hews Agag to pieces, or Samson as he commits suicide, or Jeremiah as he preaches treason.”<sup>47</sup> What allows these characters to function as examples is a proper understanding of biblical theology. Thus, for Clowney, a redemptive-historical approach does not necessarily preclude exemplarism, but properly positions it.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, Clowney’s mediating position is not the norm. Dennis Johnson summarizes the redemptive-historical opprobrium for exemplarism in *Him We Proclaim*:

Redemptive-historical preachers oppose the moralistic, particularly the exemplaristic, preaching of biblical historical narratives. They find it a serious misunderstanding of the purpose of biblical history to focus on the human participants in the narrative either as positive moral examples to be emulated, or as negative examples whose experiences warn against unbelief and evil.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 75.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>48</sup>Clowney maintains this approach in his later writings. Cf. *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture*, 33.

<sup>49</sup>Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 50.

Johnson further explicates his opposition to exemplaristic preaching due to its frequent failure adequately to qualify imperatives with the gospel:

The great weakness of moralistic, exemplaristic preaching is its tendency to enlist Old Testament examples in order to lay ethical obligations on hearers without showing how Christ kept covenant faithfulness where the negative examples failed, and how Christ's perfect righteousness fulfills even the best obedience offered by the Old Testament's most positive examples. . . . Moralism excises from the biblical narratives the source of their life-changing power, which is their testimony to the saving mercy of God in the obedience and sacrifice of Jesus.<sup>50</sup>

Greidanus articulates several concerns with the exemplaristic approach: (1) exemplaristic preaching forces the preacher to make (sometimes-difficult) moral judgments on the character's behavior; (2) it ignores the historical-cultural gap between the modern preacher and the ancient text; (3) it turns *description* into *prescription*; (4) it shifts the theocentric focus of Scripture to an anthropocentric focus in the sermon.<sup>51</sup> In summary, "Imitating Bible characters, though popular and superficially easy, is a dead-end road for true biblical preaching. It is a homiletical shortcut that results in a hermeneutical short circuit."<sup>52</sup> Elsewhere he argues that exemplarism is essentially "a degradation of redemptive history to the level of 'profane' history."<sup>53</sup>

Goldsworthy suggests that exemplarism is largely untenable because of its ambiguity: "Biblical characters, even major ones, are frequently ambiguous as to their exemplary value. It is not always clear whether some characteristic or action is a blemish or as a virtue. We need to evaluate the biblical characters, even the great heroes of the faith, in the light of the larger perspective of salvation history."<sup>54</sup> Later in the same chapter Goldsworthy suggests that teaching Bible stories exemplaristically is partly to

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<sup>50</sup>Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 234.

<sup>51</sup>Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 161–63. Emphasis original.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>53</sup>Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 59.

<sup>54</sup>Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 141.

blame for the falling away of many young people.<sup>55</sup> Although not all critiques of exemplaristic preaching devolve into similar finger pointing, the opposition among redemptive-historical proponents is virtually universal.

### **Prescriptive Preaching**

Chapell's redemptive-historical colleagues share his distaste for "Be Good" sermons. In his discussion of exemplaristic preaching, Johnson offers a definition of moralism that helpfully parallels prescriptive preaching: "the homiletic practice of issuing ethical demands without grounding them in the gospel or showing how they are integral to a grateful response to the redemptive work of God in Christ."<sup>56</sup>

In a section on preaching epistolary literature, Greidanus questions the legitimacy of preaching imperatives without the indicative of the gospel. He states,

The danger of such preaching, clearly, is that it would lead to legalism. Moreover, it is striking that in the Epistles the imperatives never function without the indicative. . . . When one's text is an exhortation, therefore, one cannot proclaim this imperative in isolation from the indicative.<sup>57</sup>

Goldsworthy similarly argues, "To say what we should be or do and not link it with a clear exposition of what God has done about our failure to be or do perfectly as he wills is to reject the grace of God and to lead people to lust after self-help and self-improvement in a way that, to call a spade a spade, is godless."<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere he states,

If eternal life is not the reward for meritorious living but the gift of grace, then all ethical imperatives are given as implications of the gospel and should be clearly seen as such. The alternative is to preach law and to leave the impression that the essence of Christianity is what we do rather than what God has done. Legalism

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<sup>55</sup>"By the time many of these children reach their teenage years they have had a belly full of morality, enough, they would think, to last them for the rest of their lives. They thus beat a retreat to live reasonably decent but gospelless lives." Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 151.

<sup>56</sup>Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 233.

<sup>57</sup>Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 326.

<sup>58</sup>Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 119.

easily creeps in even when we think we have avoided it.<sup>59</sup>

Ultimately, prescriptive preaching “is at best an exercise in wishful and pietistic thinking. It is at worst demonic in its Christ-denying legalism.”<sup>60</sup>

Such blistering analyses of prescriptive preaching are commonplace in redemptive-historical circles. David Prince, in his dissertation on Christocentric preaching, provides perhaps the most excoriating criticism:

Bryan Chapell does not overstate the case when he argues that a “message that merely advocates morality and compassion remains sub-Christian even if the preacher can prove that the Bible demands such behaviors.” *Perhaps we must go even further and say that such sermons, though well intentioned, are anti-Christian and a tool of satanic deception.*<sup>61</sup>

However, not all redemptive-historical advocates have such a harsh stance towards the ethical imperatives of Scripture. Clowney writes,

Those who have championed the preaching of the history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*) have attacked ‘moralizing.’ It has been assumed by some that a choice must be made between ethical preaching and that which is redemptive-historical. The New Testament, however, not only sanctions both but does not set them in opposition.<sup>62</sup>

Elsewhere he states, “The redemptive-historical approach necessarily yields ethical application, which is an essential part of the preaching of the Word. Whenever we are confronted with the saving work of God culminating in Christ, we are faced with ethical demands.”<sup>63</sup> Regardless of tone, the common denominator among redemptive-historical literature is an extreme allergy to any prescriptive component unqualified by a gospel indicative.

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<sup>59</sup>Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 59.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>61</sup>Prince, “Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Expository Preaching,” 132. Emphasis added.

<sup>62</sup>Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 78.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

## Exhortative Preaching

Exhortative preaching and prescriptive preaching are close cousins. “Be Good” sermons and “Be Disciplined” sermons are different not in kind, but in degree. Both types of sermons feature a heavy imperatival element, but the latter emphasizes greater frequency and diligence. Although many redemptive-historical authors do not distinguish between these two nonredemptive errors the way Chapell does, the opposition to exhortative preaching remains.

Johnson prefers the term “edificatory preaching.”<sup>64</sup> Edificatory preaching “aim[s] to motivate and guide believers to pursue changes that bring their patterns of behavior and relationships into growing conformity to God’s Word. . . . The objective of preaching to edify is to engage Christians in the intentional pursuit of transformation in both behavior and relationships.”<sup>65</sup> Although much overlap exists between prescriptive and exhortative preaching, Johnson’s presentation of edificatory preaching is most akin to the latter approach. In a critique of this position he states, “If the preacher attributes ‘stalling’ in sanctification to faulty methods rather than to feeble faith and failing motivation, might he not emphasize *self-discipline* at the expense of grace, and make duty displace grateful love as the engine that drives the pursuit of holiness?”<sup>66</sup>

Goldsworthy describes a nonredemptive sermon he once heard on the marks of a mature church. Although the exegesis was sound, he disliked the overall focus of the sermon. “The implication was that we as a congregation needed to be more diligent in producing these marks of maturity. What was missing was the way these texts belonged in the New Testament context of the exposition of the gospel. The primary focus became

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<sup>64</sup>Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 54.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>66</sup>Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 41. Emphasis added.

law, not gospel.”<sup>67</sup> He opines, “Without the gospel all the exhortations of the New Testament become not just law, but legalistic.”<sup>68</sup> In a more thorough explanation, he states,

One is unlikely to assert that we are justified by sanctification, but, whether done intentionally or not, that is what happens when we allow the teaching of Christian living, ethical imperatives, and exhortations to holiness to be separated from and to take the place of the clear statement of the gospel. We can preach our hearts out on texts about what we ought to be, what makes a mature church, or what the Holy Spirit wants to do in our lives, but if we do not constantly, in every sermon, show the link between the Spirit’s work in us to Christ’s work for us, we will distort the message and send people away with a natural theology of salvation by works.<sup>69</sup>

This brief overview of key redemptive-historical thinkers reveals a powerful consensus on the three types of nonredemptive sermons. They share disapproval, even if the tone and degree to which varying scholars disapprove may vary. Given this evidence, it is legitimate to employ Chapell’s “Deadly Be’s” to represent the RH critique of so-called nonredemptive sermons.

### **The Unifying Thread**

These nonredemptive sermons have one thing in common: they all are strictly imperatival, relying heavily on the third use of the law. In its first use, the law restrains sin. In its second use, the law reveals sin in order to drive the sinner to Christ. In its third use, the law redirects the saint towards holiness. To be clear, it is not the quest for holiness that makes the “Deadly Be’s” deadly. Chapell and others would not reject the importance of Christian holiness, but would simply contest certain methodologies (such as the third use of the law) as a legitimate means to achieve the desired end.

The law in its third use has a notable history in the Reformed tradition, but it has fallen out of favor among many theologians in recent decades. Interestingly, very few

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<sup>67</sup>Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 20.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 237.

redemptive-historical homileticians explicitly address the third use in their writings.<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, the rejection of the imperatival force of the “Deadly Be’s” implies a subtle rejection of the third use. At the very least, the increasing demands for gospel indicatives among RH advocates severely hamper the homiletical force of the third use.

John Carrick offers helpful insight to this redemptive-historical aversion to imperatives in *The Imperative of Preaching*:

It is . . . not at all surprising that those within the redemptive-historical school who eschew the concept of the example in preaching should also eschew the concept of the imperative in preaching. It is indeed very striking that the published sermons of one of the great fathers of redemptive-historical preaching—Klaas Schilder—are characterized by an almost complete absence of the imperative mood. His sermons are characterized by the indicative, but at the expense of the imperative; they are characterized by the descriptive, but at the expense of the prescriptive; they are characterized by the doxological, but at the expense of the hortatory. His sermons exhibit a very striking lack of exhortation. Indeed, it appears to follow as by an iron law of necessity that those preachers who eschew the exemplary almost invariably avoid the imperatival, with the result that exhortation and application are suppressed or even entirely eliminated.<sup>71</sup>

In fairness, not all practitioners of RHP feature the same aversion to imperatives. For example, Chapell contends,

Grace-based preaching does not eliminate the moral obligations of the law. . . . The preaching of grace should not negate the law but provide an antidote for pride in its performance and an incentive for conscientiousness in its observance. . . . When grace is properly perceived, the law is not trashed; it is treasured.”<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, the hesitancy to employ imperatives in Reformed homiletics is unavoidable. Carrick explains, “Indeed, if the liberal church has been guilty of emphasizing the imperative at the expense of the indicative, the Reformed church has, to

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<sup>70</sup>Goldsworthy briefly introduces the third use as controversial, but says little else. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 166. Greidanus briefly mentions the three uses in an overview of Calvin’s preaching. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 133–34. Neither author takes an explicit position on the third use.

<sup>71</sup> John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 131.

<sup>72</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Sermons*, xvii–xviii.

*some extent*, been guilty of emphasizing the indicative at the expense of the imperative.”<sup>73</sup>

This overemphasis manifests itself in noble efforts to avoid works-righteousness and maximize the gospel. Unfortunately, what these sermons often present are sterilized imperatives, heavily surrounded by a host of gospel caveats. Such preaching does not proclaim the gospel too much, but too narrowly. Jeffrey Mann articulates this exceptionally well,

Among certain believers, there has been such a fear of teaching works-righteousness that any meaningful statement of law is quickly followed with the promises of the gospel, as if to say that everything will be all right for those not living righteously anyway. The law is not given opportunity to do its work. Alternatively, those who do seek to balance law and gospel in their sermons often end up preaching *about* the law rather than preaching the law. Law, like gospel, must be *pro me*. The law must be preached so that I feel its accusing finger pointing at me, not as a lesson on human nature. Who will run to a physician who does not first perceive illness?<sup>74</sup>

### **The Potential Concern**

The concern with tiptoeing around the law in this manner is the potential for expositional imbalance. This imbalance is visible in at least three areas. First, it appears in RH pleas for Christian uniqueness. A cursory glance through redemptive-historical literature yields a common and oft-repeated argument: the Christian sermon is not Christian if it is not distinctively different from the sermon preached in a synagogue or mosque.<sup>75</sup> The solution to this quandary is to highlight the unique claims of the gospel,

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<sup>73</sup>Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 107; Daniel Doriani, himself a proponent of RHP, expresses similar concerns: “Some advocates of RHP are wary of any specific application, fearing that calls to change behavior will usurp the Spirit’s role in application and drift into anthropocentric moralism. Zeal to avoid moralistic readings of narrative leads some to refuse all moral use of narratives. But narratives edify too. Indicatives precede imperatives, but there *are* imperatives.” Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 296.

<sup>74</sup>Jeffrey K. Mann, “Luther and the Holy Spirit: Why Pneumatology Still Matters,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 34, no. 2 (April 2007): 116.

<sup>75</sup>Johnson, *Him We Proclaim*, 50–51; Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 273–74, 294.

thus offsetting any conflation of Christianity with error. This argument has become so pervasive that even those harboring considerable concerns with the approach have conceded its validity.<sup>76</sup>

Nevertheless, the legitimacy of this approach is questionable. How far can the preacher extend this principle? Is a sermon equally reprehensible if it is indiscernible from the sermons of modalists, annihilationists, open theists, Pelagianists, or prosperity preachers? The point here is not to blur the lines between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, but simply to suggest that truth does not necessarily contradict heresy at every point. The modalist and the Trinitarian Presbyterian agree on many points, as do the hellfire-preaching Baptist and the annihilationist. Is the biblically faithful sermon that fails to expose all points of disagreement necessarily sub-Christian? Is it enough for the preacher to “preach the Word” (2 Tim 4:2) or must he also explicitly reject the claims of subtle heresies?

Those who argue in the affirmative would further obfuscate the criteria for redemptive sermons, forcing the preacher to counter every imaginable heresy in order to qualify as a true Christ-centered preacher. It would be easier (and far safer) to turn the sermon into a short-and-sweet recitation of the Apostle’s Creed. The redemptive-historical plea for the uniqueness of the Christian sermon thrusts the gospel into the foreground as a means to distinguish Christianity from error. However, it inconsistently applies this standard to moral religions, while not requiring it for equally erroneous and damnable heresies. The point here is not that Christian preachers should strive to make their sermons less distinguishable from false religions or heretical beliefs. Rather, it is simply to question the assertion that a failure to make an explicit distinction necessarily renders a sermon as sub-Christian. Should not the barometer for Christ-centered sermons

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<sup>76</sup>Cf. Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: A Comprehensive Textbook on Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 147; Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 112.

be broader than mere refutation of error?

Second, the expositional imbalance of RHP is evident in its insistence on a recitation of the storyline of Scripture in every sermon. The deep roots of biblical theology compel the redemptive-historical preacher to highlight the scope of redemptive history every time he enters the pulpit. The unintended result of this practice is an expositional imbalance that loses the trees for the forest. Hendrik Krabbendam laments,

Preaching in the redemptive-historical tradition is often comparable to a ride in a Boeing 747 high above the landscape with its hot deserts, its snowpeaked mountains, its wide rivers, its dense forests, its open prairies, its craggy hills and its deep lakes. The view is panoramic, majestic, impressive, breathtaking and always comfortable. But there is one problem. The Christian is not “above” things. He is in the middle of things. He is trekking through the landscape. As such he experiences heat, or cold, or pain, or failure. Sometimes the journey seems interminable, or monotonous, or cheerless, or impossible. At times the traveler loses his sense of direction, or his strength to continue, or his hope of success, or his will to endure. At other times, he lacks wisdom, or expertise, or resources, or support. At all times he is engaged in battle. That is why “aesthetic contemplation” is simply not sufficient fare for the Christian on his way through life. All by itself it is a starvation diet.<sup>77</sup>

The advent of biblical theology is a truly wonderful thing. It is amazing to watch as people—from elderly saints to young toddlers—discover the epic storyline of Scripture.<sup>78</sup> It is even more exciting to watch as they begin to see between the lines and trace the Old Testament events to their climax in Christ. RHP has rightly combatted illiteracy of Scripture’s metanarrative, but an exclusive diet of this type of preaching may soon result in an illiteracy of Scripture’s countless micronarratives, each with something valuable to offer the struggling Christian.

Furthermore, no one has proposed a convincing methodology to guard against a perfunctory retelling of Scripture’s storyline. If the storyline of Scripture is a mandatory

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<sup>77</sup>Hendrik Krabbendam, “Hermeneutics and Preaching,” in *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Samuel T. Logan Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1986), 235–36.

<sup>78</sup>The pervasiveness of biblical theology in the Western church is evident by the wealth of children’s Bible books that aim to teach the stories of Scripture with an eye for the big picture.

feature of every sermon, preachers will be hard-pressed to accomplish this every week without inciting boredom. When the Spirit moved men of God to write the Scriptures, he did not simply dictate a storyline, but a massive, complex, living document. Yes, it is telling a unified story, but to reduce the complexities and detail of Scripture into a mere storyline is to flatten its impact. Moreover, an overemphasis on the biblical storyline often underemphasizes the specific text. This threatens an expositional imbalance where every sermon is about the big picture and no sermon is about the text.

Third, the expositional imbalance appears in the heightened emphasis of the individual sermon. The universal assumption of RH homiletics is that each sermon is ultimate and must outline all the contours of Christ and his gospel or it is sub-Christian, anti-Christian, or even demonic. The result is an expositional imbalance that rightly presents a plethora of gospel truths, but wrongly fails to proclaim sufficiently the truths of the text under consideration.

Finally, the expositional imbalance of RHP is visible in its pleas for law-gospel proximity. A familiar refrain among RHP advocates urges preachers to connect legal imperatives to gospel indicatives because the preacher cannot assume his hearers are Christians. Indeed, preachers often speak to a “floating congregation.”<sup>79</sup> Goldsworthy illustrates this concern with a hypothetical sermon series on a Pauline epistle. Some preachers will faithfully exposit the gospel indicatives over the course of several weeks, only to advance into an imperatival section without drawing a consistent line from indicatives to imperatives. “The result is that the exhortations and commands are no longer seen to arise out of the good news of God’s grace in the gospel but as simple imperatives of Christian behavior; as naked law.”<sup>80</sup>

The redemptive-historical solution to this problem is to issue clear gospel

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<sup>79</sup>Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 123–24.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, xiv.

indicatives in close proximity to imperatives. As Chapell states, “There are many ‘be’ messages in Scripture, but they always reside in a redemptive context. Since we cannot be anything that God would approve of apart from his sanctifying mercy and power, *grace must permeate any exhortation for biblical behavior.*”<sup>81</sup> This permeating grace would likely include, but not be limited to (1) the hearer’s inability to singlehandedly obey the imperatives, (2) the futility of meriting God’s favor through obedience, (3) the necessity of obeying as a response to Christ’s obedience, and (4) the reality that Christ has already obeyed perfectly on the sinner’s behalf.

Nevertheless, requiring preachers to move rapidly from law to gospel in a single sermon may hamper the effectiveness of both. When every legal imperative is immediately followed by a gospel indicative, the hearer can become numb to the law’s sometimes-painful ability to drive the hearer to Christ. Conversely, the gospel is far less glorious when not understood against a backdrop of unfettered law. As Owen Strachan laments, “Our modern evangelical movement, particularly the grace-loving wing, . . . has a tendency to take a biblical text, perhaps one anchored in God’s mercy but with some sharp edges, and to blend it all together. To make a gospel smoothie of it.”<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, many RHP advocates are not entirely clear on the manner in which preachers must connect the law to the gospel. Is it sufficient to issue one of the aforementioned caveats, or is the whole gamut necessary? Is the preacher sufficiently Christ-centered if he merely qualifies imperatives occasionally, or must he qualify every imperative in every instance? What does it mean to “clearly” and “constantly” connect imperatives to the gospel? Unfortunately, many RHP disciples have responded to the clarion calls for gospel indicatives by muffling imperatives entirely. What the fathers

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<sup>81</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 294. Emphasis added.

<sup>82</sup>Owen Strachan, “Pastoring the Idle,” *9marks.org*, April 18, 2013, accessed April 30, 2013, [www.9marks.org/blog/pastoring-idle](http://www.9marks.org/blog/pastoring-idle).

promote in moderation, the children practice in excess.

A more moderate RHP advocate might suggest that merely a semblance of gospel qualification is sufficient, but such moderation seems inconsistent. If it is sub-Christian to omit the indicatives (despite clearly articulating them in a previous sermon) because an unbeliever may be present later who was absent earlier, should not the preacher labor to qualify *every* imperative? After all, even the greenest of preachers can attest to the frequent occurrence of movement in the congregation as hearers shuffle in and out to relieve themselves, answer their cell phones, or check on their young children, among other things. Not to mention the all-too-common occurrence of blank stares and glazed-over eyes, as the hearer mentally leaves the building. If the preacher is going to avoid misleading his people into the throes of legalism, must he qualify *every* imperative with a gospel indicative? Applied consistently, some well-meaning Christ-centered preachers may be more likely to preach the ten caveats than the Ten Commandments.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that virtually all redemptive-historical literature treats the indicative-imperative relationship in a one-sided manner. Yes, Greidanus and others are right to assert, “The imperatives never function without the indicative.”<sup>83</sup> However, the converse is also true, the indicative never functions without the subsequent imperative. Yes, “Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative.”<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, as Carrick states, it does not end with one.<sup>85</sup> Yet, how many RH advocates urge the preacher to qualify every *indicative* with an *imperative*? Redemptive-historical warnings against antinomianism are a rare breed, while laments against legalism are a dime a dozen. Despite the desire to promote preaching as “the applicatory explication of God’s

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<sup>83</sup>Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 326.

<sup>84</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 47.

<sup>85</sup>Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 83.

Word,”<sup>86</sup> many RHP advocates seem thoroughly content to preach indicatives divorced from imperatives, provided the converse is never true.

### **Summary**

This dissertation contends that the law-gospel paradigm in Luther's Christ-centered homiletic may function as a corrective to the potential overreach among redemptive-historical exclusivists. A careful review of both the historical roots and central tenets of redemptive-historical preaching reveals the backdrop for the “Deadly Be” nomenclature. A review of leading proponents of RH homiletics reveals that Chapell’s terminology is an adequate representation of the discipline as a whole. Despite a virtually universal condemnation of these “Deadly Be” messages, a careful analysis reveals a potential for expositional imbalance that threatens redemptive-historical preaching. Nevertheless, Luther's law-gospel preaching may helpfully correct this imbalance. However, what qualifies the reformer to address this controversy? To that question we now turn.

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<sup>86</sup>D. Van Dijk, as quoted in Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 157.

## CHAPTER 3

### MARTIN LUTHER AS CORRECTIVE

The purpose of this chapter is to establish Martin Luther as a worthy contrast to the exclusivistic leanings of redemptive-historical preaching. On what grounds can a sixteenth century German theologian legitimately address a twenty-first century homiletical controversy in America? Even if he could speak to the controversy, would he have an audience willing to listen? In order to answer these questions, a brief excursus on the redemptive-historical approach to homiletical history is in order.

#### **Anti-Historical Preaching?**

In the throes of the debate in the Netherlands regarding the legitimacy of exemplaristic preaching, critics often accused those within the redemptive-historical camp of neglecting the history of Christian preaching. After all, the redemptive-historical concept was relatively new and its exclusivistic claims to legitimate Christian preaching seemed to alienate many of the church fathers. J. Douma, one of the chief defenders of the exemplaristic school, explains,

Our fathers knew very well that redemptive history is a unified structure with Christ at its center, but they still felt free to treat separately (using biblical givens) certain persons described in Scripture, to picture them psychologically, to speak of their struggles and trials, their strengths and weaknesses, and then to draw parallels between the experiences of the Bible saints and the struggles of believers today. Without any hesitation our fathers held up the virtues of the biblical persons as an example to all, but also their sins and weaknesses as a warning.<sup>1</sup>

The reality is many preachers in history fail to comply with redemptive-historical standards. Cornelis Trimp briefly surveys the preaching of both Luther and

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<sup>1</sup>As quoted in Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1970), 43.

Calvin in relation to the exemplaristic controversy. He concludes, “Luther . . . made generous use of exemplum,”<sup>2</sup> and exemplaristic preaching “was Calvin’s normal method of preaching.”<sup>3</sup> Carrick adds, “The Puritans made frequent and extensive use of examples from the Scriptures to illustrate and apply doctrine.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Carrick helpfully demonstrates a powerful and pervasive use of the imperative in the preaching of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Samuel Davies, Asahel Nettleton, and Martin Lloyd-Jones.<sup>5</sup> These examples and more indicate a degree of validity to charges of anti-historical tendencies in RHP.

In response to these accusations, RH theorists often accuse their critics of unduly sanctioning the preachers of history. For example, Greidanus retorts, “On the exemplary side one meets, at times, a reverence for the fathers bordering on deference, an uncritical acceptance of tradition, a fear of anything new.”<sup>6</sup> He continues, “Though this may have been a motive in their defence of the status quo, we would prefer to describe their basic motive as a concern for the *relevance* of the sermon.”<sup>7</sup> Rather than seriously grappling with the exemplarist concerns, Greidanus accuses his critics of an unhealthy obsession with the fathers, while simultaneously brushing aside their objections as a smokescreen for their real concerns.

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<sup>2</sup>Cornelis Trimp, *Preaching and the History of Salvation: Continuing an Unfinished Discussion*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Scarsdale, NY: Westminster Discount Book Service, 1996), 102.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>4</sup>John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 119.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 97–107, 176–87.

<sup>6</sup>Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 43.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.* Elsewhere, referring to the exemplaristic appeal to the fathers, Greidanus writes, “This lack of defense points up the shortcomings of the exemplary approach as a hermeneutic *method*, and that, in turn, is bound to have its repercussions in preaching.” *Ibid.*, 64.

To be fair, Greidanus does concede “the deep-seated nature of the exemplary approach in Reformed theology.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, despite a seemingly stubborn refusal to respond seriously to the argument from church history, Greidanus recognizes the far-reaching implications of the redemptive-historical approach: “If one wants to reject exemplary preaching, he must be fully aware of the far-reaching implications involved in such a rejection; it implies the necessity to rethink our use of Scripture in all fields.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, of all the redemptive-historical manuals surveyed in chapter two, only Greidanus features a historical overview of Christ-centered preaching.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, if proponents of exemplaristic preaching are guilty of unduly sanctioning historical preaching, RH proponents may be guilty of unduly ignoring it. While an unyielding deference to historical homiletics is certainly unwise, an unyielding dismissal is equally troubling.

The impact of such an attitude towards homiletical history is twofold. First, a failure to assess honestly modern theories in light of two millennia of Christian sermons can create an unhelpful isolationism. The unintended result may be an ingrown academy of self-proclaimed Christ-centered preachers who are deaf to everyone who disagrees with them. Certainly church history is replete with sermon styles and methodologies few would mimic today. The point is not that a homiletical approach is valid simply because it is historical, but rather that *some* (indeed, many) approaches in church history *are* valuable precisely because they have stood the test of time. Regardless, a more serious interaction with church history would likely strengthen redemptive-historical preaching.

Second, the anti-historical tendencies of redemptive-historical preaching have

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<sup>8</sup>Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 120.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 69–176.

resulted in a “chronological snobbery” of the pulpit. How many faithful preachers throughout history are “sub-Christian,” “anti-Christian,” or even “demonic” because they failed the redemptive-historical shibboleth? If redemptive-historical scholars forced the wealth of Christian sermons throughout history through their homiletical sieve, precious few would survive. What should the historian conclude? Either the Christian church has been force-fed a paltry supply of feckless fodder for nearly two thousand years, or the redemptive-historical perspective on legitimate Christian preaching is overly narrow.

### **Unlikely yet Ideal**

Enter Martin Luther. He preached his last sermon four hundred fifty years ago, long before the advent of redemptive-historical preaching. His pulpit ministry is often an afterthought compared to his theological contributions. Nevertheless, Martin Luther is an ideal candidate to correct the missteps of the redemptive-historical homiletic.

However, Luther’s role as a corrective in this controversy does not entail a wholehearted embrace of his ministry or preaching practices. Indeed, this is not an uncritical deference to Luther the preacher. In fact, his preaching practices often revealed undesirable elements. For instance, his harshness in the pulpit is worthy of criticism. Often he resorted to *ad hominem* attacks to refute his opponents, and was occasionally guilty of name-calling towards his own congregation. In addition, Luther’s preaching ministry reveals a pastor-in-progress, transitioning from austere monk to ardent reformer. Encouraging unyielding emulation of Luther’s homiletic would force one to define which homiletic is in view. Should the modern preacher emulate Luther's allegorical tendencies early in ministry, or his early tendency towards a theology of works-righteousness? These flaws pale in comparison to the anti-Semitism that occasionally appeared in Luther’s later years—a blemish on Luther’s legacy that only Christ can wipe away.

Furthermore, modern preachers should not merely avoid Luther’s flaws in the pulpit. They must also resist temptations to emulate haphazardly his style of preaching.

Trimp explains,

As many people know, Martin Luther holds a central place in the history of preaching. He was granted the privilege of rediscovering the truth that the Holy Spirit distributes the grace of Christ to the congregation through the preached Word. This signified the restoration of such honor to preaching that our preaching today would be unimaginable apart from the reformational work of Luther.

In saying this, we are not claiming that Luther determined normatively the *manner* of preaching for all the churches of the Reformation, or that every preacher must organize and arrange his sermons in the same way Luther did. Even Luther's contemporaries recognized this. Luther's manner of preaching was so much a matter of his own personality that his closest colleague, Philip Melancthon, reached back to the well-worn rules of classical rhetoric in teaching theological students how to preach. . . .

Luther's manner of preaching was not only determined by his personal capacities, but it was at the same time strongly influenced by the tradition of the Middle Ages and his contemporary culture. For these reasons, we cannot simply imitate Luther's style of preaching.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, despite these concerns, Luther still has much to offer today's preacher, particularly in his law-gospel homiletical paradigm. This paradigm uniquely situates the reformer to address the controversy at hand. He can function as a worthy contrast to the exclusivistic leanings of redemptive-historical preaching as the father of the Reformation, a staunch advocate of Christ-centered preaching, a practitioner of the discipline, a ferocious supporter of its principles, he has a widespread reputation as a Christ-centered preacher and offers a robust Christ-centered homiletic.

### **The Father of the Reformation**

First, Luther's position as the "Father of the Reformation" grants him considerable traction in the present debate. The initial controversy in the Netherlands, as well as the lingering debate in America and beyond, is essentially an intramural dispute within the Reformed tradition. Luther does not speak as one outside that tradition, but is essentially its fountainhead. Where better to settle a quarrel on Reformed homiletics than in Wittenberg, where the very notion of a Protestant sermon began?

Indeed, many of the arguments in favor of the redemptive-historical position

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<sup>11</sup>Trimp, *Preaching and the History of Salvation*, 102. Emphasis original.

feature freight borrowed from the reformers. Familiar RH concepts like *sola Scriptura*, the grammatical-historical method, and the christocentric necessity have clear Reformation roots. Even the primacy of the sermon, without which RH literature would be unnecessary, is a product of Reformation theology. This is not to suggest that preachers should accept the homiletical practices of the reformers without question. An unswerving emulation of Luther's homiletic may prove unwise, and the same is true for the other reformers. Nevertheless, the RH method should not discard the Reformed approach without a fair hearing. Luther's status in the Reformation uniquely situates him to facilitate this debate.

### **A Christ-Centered Advocate**

Although his Reformation roots are important, Luther's radical advocacy for Christ-centered preaching is even more pertinent. His mantra was *Nihil nisi Christus praedicantur*—"Nothing except Christ is preached."<sup>12</sup> He urged aspiring preachers to "preach nothing but Jesus Christ and of faith in him."<sup>13</sup> In his exegesis of Romans 10:4, he asserted, "every word in the Bible points to Christ," and "the whole Scripture, if one contemplates it inwardly, deals everywhere with Christ."<sup>14</sup> He also said that Christ "is the man to whom [Scripture] all applies, every bit of it."<sup>15</sup>

Luther arrived at this radically christocentric understanding of Scripture differently than his redemptive-historical counterparts. Most RH literature points to

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<sup>12</sup>Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 16.

<sup>13</sup>Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils*, vol. 2, ed. Eugene F. A. Klug, trans. Eugene F. A. Klug et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 185.

<sup>14</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther: Lectures on Romans*, trans. Wilhelm Pauck, Library of Christian Classics 15 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 288.

<sup>15</sup>Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the Old Testament," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 247.

passages like Luke 24:27 or 1 Corinthians 1:23 to prove an internal argument within Scripture to testify of its christocentricity. For Luther, this would be putting the cart before the horse. Scripture is not interpreted christocentrically because of a self-attestation, but because Christ is superior and more precious than Scripture. In other words, whereas RHP begins with Scripture and looks to Christ, Luther began with Christ as supremely valuable and then interpreted Scripture in light of that reality.

This notion is visible by contrasting Luther's twin doctrines of *sola Scriptura* and *solus Christus*.<sup>16</sup> *Sola Scriptura* was crucial to his theology—he was, after all, a professor of Bible. Exegesis in Romans led to his famous "Tower Discovery" of justification *sola fide*. At Worms, he famously said, "my conscience is captive to the Word of God."<sup>17</sup> When reflecting upon the success of the Reformation, he confessed "I did nothing; the Word did everything."<sup>18</sup> In his *Freedom of the Christian*, he argued that Scripture is central to the survival of the church.<sup>19</sup> In a letter to Ambrosias he asserted, "The church's entire life and substance reside in the Word of God."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. Hughes Oliphant Old, who states, "Luther's theology of the Word is the bedrock on which his preaching was based." Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 4, *The Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 38.

<sup>17</sup>Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), 144.

<sup>18</sup>Luther, *LW*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 77. Emphasis added. Luther also rebukes the Wittenberg congregation for their unwillingness to follow his example in his fifth sermon (91).

<sup>19</sup>Luther, *LW*, vol. 30, *The Catholic Epistles*, ed. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 345.

<sup>20</sup>David W. Lotz, "Sola Scriptura: Luther on Biblical Authority," *Interpretation* 35, no. 3 (July 1981): 261. William Marsh argues a convincing, but contrary, position: "Luther assigns Christ to Scripture's *sensus literalis* because of the textual "pressure" he experiences exerted by the Bible itself that leads to the assumption of this primary referent. To put it another way, to make a declaration about the essence of Scripture as the Word of God is in the first place a textual matter, not a dogmatic one, for Luther." William M. Marsh, "Martin Luther's Messianic Rationale for Christ as the *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture in His Prefaces to the Bible" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern

Nevertheless, Luther's doctrine of the Word was intrinsically tri-perspectival. First, Christ is the eternal Word of God. Second, the sermon is the spoken Word of God. Third, Scripture is the written Word of God. Scripture as God's Word exists *for the sake of* the eternal Word and the spoken word. Therefore, in Luther's theology Scripture was God's Word in a "secondary or derivative sense."<sup>21</sup> Luther rooted his *sola Scriptura* in *solus Christus*. In other words, Scripture is highly regarded because Scripture highly regards the gospel, which centers on Christ.<sup>22</sup>

For Luther, the gospel finds its *telos* in the exaltation of Christ. Simply put, Luther believed that the purpose of the gospel is to exalt Christ. Therefore, the driving principle behind his conception of the gospel is *solus Christus*. The gospel should be highly regarded because it highly regards Christ. What makes the gospel so important is not primarily its *truthfulness* (although it is true), but its *Christ-centeredness*.

The primacy of the Eternal Word (Christ) over the written Word (Scripture) is also visible in Luther's *Lectures on Galatians*. Here he referred to Scripture as a Queen; all must submit to her, be they pope, doctor, bishop, or peasant.<sup>23</sup> However, later in the lectures he castigated those who preached a doctrine of works from Scripture. He accused them of stressing "the servant" (Scriptures) instead of bowing before the King (Christ).<sup>24</sup> Though Scripture may be queen, Jesus is King.

Understanding this hierarchical relationship is essential to grasping Luther's controversial stance on the canon. When canonicity and his gospel collide, the gospel

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Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 256.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 263.

<sup>22</sup>As Old states, "The preached Word has authority because it is the Word of Christ." *Reading and Preaching*, 4:40.

<sup>23</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians Chapters 1-4* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 58.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 295.

always won. For example, Luther threatened to burn James, “a right strawy epistle” because in his view the book failed to magnify Christ.<sup>25</sup> In other words, it missed the gospel. Furthermore, books like 2 Peter, Esther, and Revelation received the same suspicion because Luther doubted their effectiveness in proclaiming Christ, the purpose of the gospel. He summarizes this position in his *Preface to the New Testament*,

This is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether or not they inculcate Christ . . . . Whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it.<sup>26</sup>

Luther's touchstone for canonicity was *was treibet Christus*, "whatever proclaims Christ."<sup>27</sup> This was no arbitrary principle for Luther, but one firmly fixed in his conception of the gospel and its purposes. What makes the gospel good news is its magnification of Christ.

For this reason, Christ-centered gospel proclamation was not optional in Luther's homiletic. Those who fail to proclaim Christ adequately should simply stop preaching. He explained, “The priests have no other office than to preach the clear sun, Christ. . . . Let the preachers take care that they preach thus or let them be silent.”<sup>28</sup>

Elsewhere he contended,

Whoever, therefore, does not know or preach the gospel is not only no priest or bishop, but he is a kind of pest to the church, who under the false title of priest or bishop is dressed in sheep's clothing, actually does violence to the gospel and plays the wolf in the church.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Luther, *LW*, 35: 362; Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 34, *Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 317; cf. Timothy George, ““A Right Strawy Epistle”” *Reformation Perspectives on James*,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 20–31.

<sup>26</sup>Luther, *LW*, 35: 396.

<sup>27</sup>Lotz, “Sola Scriptura,” 272.

<sup>28</sup>As quoted in Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 17.

<sup>29</sup>As quoted in *ibid.*

This high calling to proclaim Christ in the pulpit drove Luther to invest considerable energies in preaching the gospel accounts. Despite pervasive accusations that he ignored most of Scripture in favor of Paul's writings, his preaching actually indicates the contrary. Meuser explains,

His doctrinal preference for Romans is well-known. Not nearly so well-known is the fact that of all the sermons he preached—probably over 4000—and of the 2300 that have been preserved, only about 30 were on Romans. That is less than 1 1/2%. . . . It is often implied that he pushed the Gospels aside in favor of a few favorite Epistle texts which became the touchstone for everything else in Scripture. Those who have read his sermons know better. Sheer numbers don't prove anything, but he has more than 1000 sermons on the synoptic gospels alone, plus many hundreds on John.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, preaching sermons on the gospels with mere information about the incarnate Christ was not sufficient for Luther. Preaching Christ as mere historical literature or theological narrative is woefully inadequate and sub-Christian. The Christ-centered sermon must preach Christ *pro me*:

It is not enough or in any sense Christian to preach the works, life, and words of Christ as historical facts, as if the knowledge of these would suffice. . . . Rather ought Christ to be preached that faith in him may be established and that he may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and me, and that what is said of him and is denoted in his name may be effectual in us. Such faith is produced and preserved by preaching why Christ came, what he brought and bestowed, what benefit it is to us to accept him.<sup>31</sup>

In the last sermon Luther preached, he summed up his views on preaching with two parallel truths. First, he believed that preaching should be expository. He stated, "Right preachers should diligently and faithfully teach only the word of God and seek only his honor and praise."<sup>32</sup> Second, preaching should be Christ-centered. He explained, "None other should be preached or taught except the Son of God alone."<sup>33</sup> Similar statements pervade his work because Luther viewed true preaching to be Christ-centered

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<sup>30</sup>Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 18.

<sup>31</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, *Career of the Reformer I* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 357.

<sup>32</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 388.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

preaching.<sup>34</sup>

### **A Christ-Centered Preacher**

Luther was not merely a proponent of Christ-centered preaching, but a meticulous practitioner. It is one thing to fiercely proclaim the importance of preaching Christ; it is quite another to devote your life to doing just that. Some homileticians are signpost preachers, pointing aspiring preachers in the right direction while rarely traveling the same road themselves. Luther was guilty of no such thing. He was not an ivory-tower theologian pontificating on homiletical theories, but a firebrand preacher living in the trenches. He practiced in the pulpit the same Christ-centeredness he preached in his writings.

Few Christ-centered preachers in history were as dedicated to preaching as Martin Luther. “He sometimes preached as many as four times a day. . . . During 1529, it is recorded, he preached three or four times a week; in 1541, often four times on a Sunday and two or three times in the week; on holidays commonly twice.”<sup>35</sup> Meuser adds that in 1529 “we have 121 sermons, even though severe headaches and spells of dizziness were becoming frequent. On 40 days that year he preached twice.”<sup>36</sup> All this while balancing the unrelenting demands of his professorship at the university, the abundance of theological treatises he composed during this period, his translation of the Bible into German, and a travel schedule that would rattle the most restless of individuals. Meuser concludes, “His was a remarkable and tireless preaching ministry. His productivity was

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<sup>34</sup>The issue here is how one defines genuine Christ-centered preaching. This dissertation will demonstrate that Luther's understanding of Christ-centered preaching is broader than that upheld by many proponents of redemptive-historical preaching.

<sup>35</sup>Edwin C. Dargan, *A History of Preaching* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1905), 1:370.

<sup>36</sup>Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 28.

prodigious, almost miraculous.”<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, scholars should not measure Luther’s contribution as a preacher merely by his prolificacy, but also by his simplicity. The redemptive-historical school has frequently endured the charge of being excessively cerebral, resulting in mere “lectures on redemptive history, sermons without tangible relevance.”<sup>38</sup> One noteworthy example is the preaching of Geerhardus Vos. He was the first professor of biblical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1894-1932, and his sermons are frequently idealized by RH proponents.<sup>39</sup> Carrick opines,

We recognize most readily the erudition and profundity of Vos as a theologian and the richness and profundity of Vos’s sermons; we do not, however regard Vos as an ideal model for preachers . . . we believe that his homiletical style is essentially too heavy, too theological, too demanding, and savours too much of the essayist. . . . For these reasons we believe that Dr. J. Gresham Machen was unquestionably correct when, as a student at Princeton Seminary, he made this general observation concerning Vos’s preaching: “He is usually rather too severely theological for Sunday morning.”<sup>40</sup>

Martin Luther has borne many accusations, but none has accused him of excessive erudition or profundity in the pulpit. This is not because Luther lacked intelligence, or espoused a shallow theology. On the contrary, Luther possessed the highest intellectual training the medieval world could afford. His theology was nothing if not profound. Nevertheless, the reformer was a preacher for the people. His sermons are replete with simple illustrations connecting profound truth with everyday life for the sake of his hearers. Lawson explains, “Although Luther was the ranking scholar of the world in which he moved, he targeted his sermon delivery not to the intellectual or religious

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<sup>37</sup>Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 28.

<sup>38</sup>Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 43.

<sup>39</sup>Carrick suggests that among more extreme proponents of the RH school, Vos is not merely idealized, but idolized. Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 138.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

elite, but to the common people.”<sup>41</sup> Luther himself explained,

Nobody understands a sermon that is turgid, deep, removed from life. . . . Philip [Melanchthon] does not need to be instructed, and I do not teach or lecture for his sake, but we preach publicly for the sake of the plain people. Christ could have taught in a profound way, but he wished to deliver his message with the utmost simplicity in order that the common people might hear and understand.<sup>42</sup>

### **A Christ-Centered Tenacity**

Some may concede Luther’s Christ-centered preferences and practices and still question Luther’s relevance as a potential corrective. After all, the redemptive-historical school boasts an indomitable passion for Christ-centeredness, resulting in a necessary exclusivism. Was Luther’s passion for his own brand of Christ-centered preaching equally ardent?

Luther was no milquetoast theologian, peddling a methodology devoid of conviction. His christocentric theology and methodology promotes an unrivaled tenacity. One example is particularly telling. In October 1529, a colloquy in Marburg attempted to unite the reform movements in Germany in Switzerland. Theologians like Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, John Oecolampadius, Philip Melanchthon, and others attended the summit.

Initially the discussions went smoothly, with a theological consensus reached on the first fourteen articles. Nevertheless, the final article led to sharp disagreement concerning the Lord’s Supper. The debate was primarily concerned with the phrase, *hoc est corpus meum*—“this is my body.” Luther and the German theologians believed in a literal interpretation of Jesus’ words. The elements did not transform into the body and blood of Christ as the Roman church believed, but Scripture did teach a genuine “real

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<sup>41</sup>Steven J. Lawson, *The Heroic Boldness of Martin Luther* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2013), 90–91.

<sup>42</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 54, *Table Talk*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 383–84.

presence” of Christ in the sacrament. Zwingli disagreed, interpreting Christ’s meaning as “this *represents* my body.” Christ’s intent was for the elements to serve as a memorial of his atonement.

Both Luther and Zwingli believed themselves to be right, and the Marburg Colloquy ended in a disappointing failure. As the meeting ended, someone asked Luther if he believed his theological opponents were nonetheless orthodox. Brecht explains Luther’s response: “Considering the dissension on the Lord’s Supper, there was no way in which Luther could state that they had the same spirit.”<sup>43</sup> In the end, Luther could not even bring himself to shake Zwingli’s hand.<sup>44</sup>

The purpose here is not to render a judgment on the results of the Marburg Colloquy. Rather, Luther’s tenacity for doctrinal purity here demonstrates his general approach to truth. Luther rejected Zwingli’s theology because he considered it a denial of Christ. This response was not atypical for the Wittenberg theologian, but an adequate representation of his christological passion. One may doubt the legitimacy of Luther’s stubbornness on this particular issue, but he should not question the reformer’s tenacity for Christ-centeredness.

### **A Christ-Centered Reputation**

The result of Luther’s Christ-centered tenacity is a well-earned reputation as one of the most Christ-centered preachers in church history.<sup>45</sup> The clear consensus that

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<sup>43</sup>Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 332.

<sup>44</sup>One should not assume this gesture implies hostility on Luther’s part. In the end, the theologians agreed, “Each side should demonstrate Christian love toward the other, insofar as conscience permitted, and they should pray that God would confirm them in the right understanding.” Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>The past few decades have seen great turbulence in Luther scholarship, largely resulting from implications arising out of New Testament scholarship. Those within the self-proclaimed “New Perspective” on Paul (NPP), accuse Luther of misreading Paul’s views on the law entirely. If Luther’s law-gospel preaching flows from

Luther's preaching is unequivocally Christ-centered uniquely situates him to serve as a potential corrective. A cursory glance through a dozen modern books on preaching may offer just as many goals for the sermon, but no such multiplicity dwells in Luther's preaching. "All preaching for Luther had one supreme aim: Justification of sinners through faith in what God has done in Christ."<sup>46</sup> "The center of Scripture for Luther is Christ, present in both the Old and New Testaments."<sup>47</sup> His preaching was "relentlessly Christ-centered"<sup>48</sup> and "permeated" by Christ.<sup>49</sup> His sermons "enhanced the position of Christ within the sermon."<sup>50</sup> "Like St. Paul before him, Martin Luther was determined to

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a misunderstanding of Paul, he can no longer be upheld as a model for preachers. Nevertheless, addressing the NPP is far outside the scope of this study. Suffice it to say, this study joins the chorus of historians who reject the New Perspective's scholarship on Luther. Cf. Robert G. Artinian, "Luther After the Stendahl/Sanders Revolution: A Responsive Evaluation of Luther's View of First-Century Judaism in His 1535 Commentary on Galatians," *Trinity Journal* 27 (2006): 77–99; Karl P. Donfried, "Paul and the Revisionists: Did Luther Really Get It All Wrong?," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 31–40; Timothy George, "Modernizing Luther, Domesticating Paul: Another Perspective," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: A Fresh Appraisal of Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, vol. 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 437–63; Wilfried Härle, "Rethinking Paul and Luther," *Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (2006): 303–17; Carl Trueman, "A Man More Sinned Against than Sinning? The Portrait of Martin Luther in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship" (The Christian Doctrine Tyndale Lecture, Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical and Theological Research, Cambridge, 2000), accessed April 15, 2013, [www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/man-more-sinned-against-sinning-portrait-martin-lu/](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/man-more-sinned-against-sinning-portrait-martin-lu/); Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Paul F. M. Zahl, "E. P. Sanders's Paul vs. Luther's Paul: Justification by Faith in the Aftermath of a Scholarly Crisis," *Saint Luke's Journal of Theology* 34, no. 3 (June 1991): 33–40; Paul F. M. Zahl, "Mistakes of the New Perspective on Paul," *Themelios* 27, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 5–11.

<sup>46</sup>Henry S. Wilson, "Luther on Preaching as God Speaking," *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005): 71.

<sup>47</sup>Donald K. McKim, ed., "Martin Luther," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 691.

<sup>48</sup>Lawson, *Heroic Boldness*, 71.

<sup>49</sup>Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 18–19.

know nothing but Christ and Him crucified.”<sup>51</sup> For Luther, even a book like Genesis “rings with the presence of Christ.”<sup>52</sup> Christ was “explicitly found in OT texts and expressly preached in OT sermons.”<sup>53</sup> A christocentric exposition of the gospel characterized “Luther’s preaching no matter what the occasion.”<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, Luther’s Christ-centered reputation is not merely due to a frequent mention of Jesus in his sermons. Similar to the redemptive-historical pillar of biblical continuity, Luther demonstrated a profound understanding of the unity of Scripture. Martin Brecht observes, “In interpreting Genesis, Luther was concerned first and foremost with the unity of the Old and New Testaments.”<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, scholars note Luther’s effective proclamation of redemptive history. Jarislov Pelikan explains,

His repudiation of the legalism which he saw in previous interpretations of the Old Testament—as though the Old Testament were only Law, still binding upon Christians, and the New Testament were only Gospel—enabled him to discern the redemptive theme in Old Testament history. Because he did not identify the Old Testament with the Law, he was able to find the Word of God as Gospel in the Old Testament.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Elmer Carl Kiessling, *The Early Sermons of Luther and Their Relation to the Pre Reformation Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1935), 147.

<sup>51</sup>John T. Pless, “Martin Luther: Preacher of the Cross,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 51, no. 2–3 (1987): 83.

<sup>52</sup>Frederic W. Baue, “Luther on Preaching as Explanation and Exclamation,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (1995): 415.

<sup>53</sup>Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), 245.

<sup>54</sup>David S. Smith, “Luther and Spurgeon: Purposeful Preachers,” *Concordia Journal* 22 (1996): 38.

<sup>55</sup>Brecht, *Luther*, 2:58.

<sup>56</sup>Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 57. Contra, Greidanus, who writes, “Another shortcoming [in Luther’s preaching] is the distinction between law and gospel as the boundary between the Old Testament and the New. As we have seen, Luther acknowledges some slippage either way, but he doggedly hangs on to the Old Testament as law and the New Testament as gospel.” Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 125.

Perhaps most telling is the reputation for Christ-centered preaching that Luther maintains among RH theorists. For example, Greidanus credits Luther for his christological focus: “Luther’s christological interpretation and preaching contain many valuable elements. As no one else in his time, Luther preaches the gospel of God’s grace, that is, Jesus Christ is God’s gift (*sola gratia*), a gift we can receive only by faith (*sola fide*).”<sup>57</sup>

Despite his general praise for Luther’s christocentricity, Greidanus expresses several concerns. He continues,

Besides our praise of Luther’s method, we also need to consider some shortcomings. First, Luther’s christological method may lead to reading Christ back into the Old Testament text. . . . Heinrich Bornkamm . . . concludes, “Any research which thinks historically will have to give up, without hesitation or reservation, Luther’s scheme of christological prediction in the Old Testament.”

A further concern is that Luther’s concentration on preaching Christ may lead to a slighting of other fundamental revelations in the Old Testament: What about God’s *good* creation, human stewardship of God’s earth, redemptive history, the coming kingdom of God in the Old Testament, God’s covenant, the value of God’s law for Christian living?<sup>58</sup>

The impact of Greidanus’ analysis is crucial: despite Luther’s admirable christocentricity, he nonetheless goes too far in his desire to preach Christ. Greidanus is either accusing Luther of being too Christ-centered, or accusing him of being Christ-centered in the wrong way.

Greidanus lists two primary concerns with Luther’s christocentric methodology. First, at times Luther reads Christ back into the Old Testament text. While no serious scholar can deny this tendency, this shortcoming is not intrinsic to Luther’s homiletic. In other words, Luther does not always treat the Old Testament in this way. Therefore, this concern is a *potential* concern with Luther’s homiletic, not an inherent one. Second,

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<sup>57</sup>Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 124.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 125; The Bornkamm quote comes from *Luther and the Old Testament*, ed. Victor I. Gruhn, trans. Eric W. Gritsch and Ruth C. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 262.

Greidanus is concerned that Luther's homiletic may slight other fundamental revelations in the Old Testament. Once again, this concern is potential, not inherent. Therefore, despite his homiletical deficiencies, Luther's christological missteps are errors of degree, not kind. In other words, Greidanus' concerns seem to be focused on Luther's excessive christocentrism. Why would a redemptive-historical uneasiness with Luther's brand of christocentrism make him an ideal candidate to correct the RH homiletic? Because, if even Luther is guilty of preaching "Deadly Be" messages, the redemptive-historical definition of Christ-centeredness may be too narrow.

### **A Christ-Centered Homiletic**

Of course, the statement above is not *necessarily* true. It is certainly possible for a heavily Christ-centered preacher to fall outside the bounds of RHP without necessarily toppling the entire homiletic. For example, few evangelicals would deny the overt Christ-centeredness in the preaching of Charles Spurgeon. Nevertheless, despite the general esteem held for the pulpit giant, calls for imitating his methodology are scarce.<sup>59</sup> It does not follow that because Spurgeon's homiletic collides with RHP that the latter is unquestionably too narrow.

Is Luther any different? Is he simply another homiletical outlier, widely esteemed by Reformed evangelicals but generally avoided methodologically? A superficial glance at the issues might suggest this, but a closer examination of Luther's homiletic warrants a different conclusion. Luther's Christ-centeredness is rooted in a robust law-gospel paradigm that has much to offer the current debate. By examining the reformer's preaching on its own terms, rather than simply viewing it in light of assumptions from later Lutheranism, a more balanced Christ-centered homiletic emerges.

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<sup>59</sup>"Even the most generous reviewers will admit that Spurgeon makes many errors in his interpretation of Scripture." Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 160.

There one finds a Christ-centeredness not just worthy of admiration, but of emulation. For these reasons and more, Luther's law-gospel paradigm may function as a corrective to the potential overreach among redemptive-historical exclusivists.

### **A Final Word on Sermon Selection**

After establishing the relevance of Luther as a worthy contrast to the exclusivistic leanings of redemptive-historical preaching, a final word on sermon selection is in order. Which sermons does this dissertation marshal to support its thesis? What confidence can one have of authorial objectivity? To address these questions adequately, a more thorough explanation of the principles of selection is in order.

In the limited space in a dissertation, the desire is to present as comprehensive a portrait of Luther's preaching as possible. Achieving this goal requires sufficient diversity of sermons, superintended by seven principles of selection divided into two sets. The priority rests in the first set, constituting the major principles of selection. In other words, these principles are more essential and absolute. The sermons selected satisfy the major principles completely. A lower priority rests in the second set, constituting the minor principles. Due to space limitations, this dissertation restricts sermons to sixteen separate analyses.<sup>60</sup> It employs the minor principles to select the final remaining sermons after satisfying the major principles. The minor principles are important, but not essential. The sermons selected satisfy the minor principles relatively, but not completely.

The first major principle for sermon selection is *genre diversity*. Luther's law-gospel paradigm must successfully transcend the various genres of Scripture if it is to successfully test and correct the exclusivistic tendencies of redemptive-historical preaching. Therefore, selection includes sermons from each of the primary genres of

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<sup>60</sup>The restriction is not to sixteen *sermons*, but sixteen separate *analyses*. One particular group of eight sermons will be included due to their historical relevance, but their analysis will appear as a group, not individually. Luther's two sermons on Jude will be analyzed together, partly due to editorial conflation.

Scripture. Luther's 1521 sermon based on Exodus 25:9-27:18 represents the *Law* genre. His 1516 sermon on Psalm 19:1 reveals his handling of *Wisdom* literature. His 1545 sermon on Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 uncovers his preaching on the *Prophetic* genre. His three sermons on Matthew 11:25-30 (see below) exhibit the *Gospel* genre.<sup>61</sup> His 1546 sermon on Acts 9:1-19 represents the *Narrative* genre. His 1532 sermon on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 demonstrates his treatment of the *Epistolary* genre. His 1544 sermon on Revelation 12:7-12 represents the *Apocalyptic* genre.

The second major principle for sermon selection is *epochal diversity*. Luther's theology and homiletic is noteworthy for its development, especially in the early years of his ministry. Highly pertinent subjects like his understanding of the law develop and mature over time. Therefore, in order to present a more comprehensive understanding of Luther's preaching, selection represents three epochs in the reformer's life. Following the example of Martin Brecht in his magisterial three-volume biography of Luther, the three epochs are the early Luther (1483-1521), Luther in mid-career (1521-1532), and the mature Luther (1532-1546). The distribution between these epochs is not equal, since considerably fewer sermons are available from Luther's early years. Furthermore, many consider Luther's preaching in this period "pre-reformational." Therefore, a slight slant toward the final two epochs is justifiable. The first epoch features four sermon analyses, and the remaining two each features six.

The third major principle for sermon selection is *homiletical progression*. In other words, insofar as it is possible, the sermons should provide an opportunity to trace

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<sup>61</sup>The higher inclusion of New Testament sermons herein, and specifically sermons on the gospels, is comparable to Luther's actual preaching practices. Elmer Kiessling explains, "For every one taken from the Old Testament there are five taken from the New, a fact which is easily explained when we remember that Luther ordinarily preached on the pericopes for Sundays and festivals. Of the Old Testamental texts, the five books of Moses, the Psalter, and Isaiah yield the greatest number. . . . There are more than three times as many texts from the gospels as there are from the epistles." Kiessling, *Early Sermons*, 49-50.

Luther's chronological development (or lack thereof) on a particular passage. This is especially crucial given the developing nature of Luther's theology. To that end, three sermons on Matthew 11:25-30—one from each main period of his life—are included in the selection. Furthermore, Luther's preference for preaching the synoptic gospels further justifies the inclusion of three sermons from this text.

The fourth major principle for sermon selection is *sermon relevance*. Certain sermons have such profound relevance both historically and topically that their omission would seem negligent. One such set of sermons is the *Invocavit Sermons* preached upon Luther's return to Wittenberg in 1522. Neil Leroux asserts, "The *Invocavit Sermons* are still the most famous of all sermons preached by Luther."<sup>62</sup> These sermons were essential to the survival of the Reformation, and their historical importance cannot be overstated. Chapter six analyzes these sermons together. A second collection of equally important sermons is Luther's *Sermons on the Catechism* from 1528. These sermons were crucial in the development of the vocabulary that would eventually become Luther's Large and Small Catechisms.<sup>63</sup> Of particular note for this dissertation is Luther's homiletical handling of the Ten Commandments. Therefore, the first sermon from this series—an exposition of the First Commandment—is analyzed in chapter six. A final important sermon is the *Sermon at Coburg on Cross and Suffering* from 1530. This sermon is noteworthy for its passionate portrayal of the suffering of Christ and his church. Preached during a historical moment where persecution seemed imminent, its brilliant presentation of Luther's law-gospel paradigm is invaluable to understanding the reformer's homiletic.

The first minor principle for sermon selection is *authorial diversity*. Similar to genre diversity, this principle aims to present as broad a scope of Luther's exegesis as

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<sup>62</sup>Neil R. Leroux, *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 13.

<sup>63</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 135.

possible. However, this principle goes beyond genre diversity in an effort to represent as many biblical authors as possible. The sermons already mentioned above feature the biblical authors Moses, David, Isaiah, Hosea, Matthew, Luke, Paul, and John. To add to this list, a 1523 exposition on Jude's epistle, a 1539 sermon on 1 Peter 4:7-11, and a 1545 sermon on Hebrews 13:4 are analyzed.

The second minor principle for sermon selection is *chronological diversity*. Similar to epochal diversity, this principle aims to distribute sermons broadly over Luther's life. However, this principle goes beyond epochal diversity in an effort to represent as many years of his preaching ministry as possible. To that end, chapter five analyzes Luther's first recorded sermon, a 1510 homily on Matthew 7:12. Furthermore, when various options were available for selection, the principle of chronological diversity was often a deciding factor.

The final minor principle for sermon selection is *style diversity*. This principle represents an effort to explore a stylistically diverse collection of Luther's preaching. For example, selection included topical sermons in addition to the more frequent expositional sermon. In addition, selection included Mid-week sermons, Sunday sermons, and those given on special occasions like funerals. This principle was active in the selection of several of the sermons listed above.

In conclusion, the sermons analyzed herein are not arbitrary selections. They were included based on the consistent and careful application of seven crucial principles of selection. The result is sixteen sermon analyses that afford a detailed glance into the pulpit of one of the giants of christocentric preaching.

### **Summary**

The influence of Luther's christocentric preaching can hardly be overstated. Indeed, as Abraham Kuruvilla states, "Luther was largely responsible for the emphasis on

christocentric preaching in the Protestant church.”<sup>64</sup> Due largely to this influence, Luther is an ideal historical candidate to challenge the exclusivistic leanings of redemptive-historical preaching. Furthermore, the sermons selected herein represent a concise, but reasonably thorough representation of the reformer’s preaching.

The unwillingness for a seminal RH thinker like Greidanus to condone Luther’s brand of Christ-centered preaching is particularly telling. If a more careful examination of Luther’s preaching practices reveals consistent and pervasive “nonredemptive” elements, Luther will be in the awkward position of being simultaneously too Christ-centered yet not Christ-centered enough. However, before this investigation can begin, a more careful and thorough examination of Luther’s homiletic is necessary.

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<sup>64</sup>Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text*, 244.

## CHAPTER 4

### A WITTENBERG HOMILETIC

On January 7, 1505, the 21-year-old Martin Luther graduated from the University of Erfurt with a Master of Arts degree. Well on his way to an early doctorate in jurisprudence and a promising career in law, none could predict that Luther would leave his lasting influence in the pulpit. Forty years later Luther would be preaching nearly every day of the week, leaving a massive corpus of over two thousand three hundred sermons behind.<sup>1</sup>

Before delving into the reformer's actual sermons, his homiletic must be understood. The aim of this chapter is to illustrate and explain his unique contribution to the pulpit. How did Luther define a faithful sermon? This chapter demonstrates that for the Wittenberg preacher, the faithful sermon was God spoken, Spirit-directed, text-driven, Christ-centered, law/gospel expressed, and hearer-sensitive. Luther's view of preaching is unrecognizable apart from his belief that God speaks through the sermon. The *means* of God's voice in the sermon is the Holy Spirit. The *material* with which God speaks is the Scriptures. The *message* of Scripture centers on Christ. The *manner* in which God speaks to his people is the twofold language of law and gospel. The *method* employed by the preacher in communicating God's speech requires pastoral sensitivity to

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<sup>1</sup>Meuser illustrates Luther's typical preaching load: "A quick review of the weekly Wittenberg congregational calendar would show . . . services on Sunday at 5:00 A.M. with a service on the Epistle, again at 10:00 with a sermon on the Gospel, and again in the afternoon on one of the lessons, the Old Testament, or the Catechism; Mondays and Tuesdays sermons were on the Catechism, Wednesdays on Matthew's gospel, Thursday and Friday, the Apostolic Letters were used; Saturday late afternoon was usually devoted to John's gospel." Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 37–38.

the congregation.

After unpacking Luther's homiletic, this chapter explains how best to evaluate the faithfulness of a sermon. Which component(s) of the faithful sermon is best equipped as a gauge for pulpit fidelity? This chapter argues that the law-gospel paradigm must be primary. This is not to suggest a *de facto* superiority, but simply as a metric for homiletical fidelity. In other words, each component is essential and interconnected, but the law-gospel paradigm is most preferable to gauge the faithfulness of the sermon. A close examination of the components themselves supports this assertion, as does Luther's own view. After justifying the primacy of the law-gospel paradigm as a metric for sermon fidelity, this chapter concludes with several keys to rightly discerning the presence of law and gospel in the sermon.

### **God-Spoken**

Luther's most fundamental contribution to homiletics was his concept of *Deus loquens*—the belief that God himself speaks through the sermon. For Luther, the sermon was nothing less than the very words of God spoken through a human mouthpiece. He firmly believed that the fundamental nature of the sermon was not mere words *about* God but words *from* God. Henry Wilson asserts, "Luther's greatest service to preaching is the recovery of the biblical understanding of preaching — God speaking (*Deus loquens*). Preaching is not mere human talk, but it is God himself speaking to individuals through human preachers."<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Hirsch agrees, "This is the most characteristic and the most profound thing which Luther said about preaching."<sup>3</sup> The sermon is, in effect, an

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<sup>2</sup>Henry S. Wilson, "Luther on Preaching as God Speaking," *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (2005): 63. See also, J. Mark Beach, "The Real Presence of Christ in the Preaching of the Gospel: Luther and Calvin on the Nature of Preaching," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999): 77–134.

<sup>3</sup>Emmanuel Hirsch, "Luthers Predigtweise," *Luther: Mitteilungen der Luthergesellschaft* 1954:16. As quoted in Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 13.

“audible sacrament.”<sup>4</sup>

This sacramental view of preaching is pervasive throughout Luther’s writings.

He illustrated this belief in a sermon from the Gospel of John:

To be sure, I do hear the sermon; however, I am wont to ask: ‘Who is speaking?’ The pastor? By no means! You do not hear the pastor. Of course, the voice is his, but the words he employs are really spoken by my God. Therefore I must hold the Word of God in high esteem that I may become an apt pupil of the Word.<sup>5</sup>

For Luther, the voice of God in the sermon was not a goal to achieve, but an ontological reality. In other words, the sermon should not *strive* to be the Word of God; it *is* the Word of God. The fundamental nature of the sermon is not mere words *about* God, but the Word *of* God. Indeed, *Deus loquens* is so central to Luther’s homiletic that nothing he said about preaching can be divorced from it.

### **Spirit-Directed**

If the sermon is the Word of God, what means does God use to speak to his people? For Luther, the answer was clearly the Holy Spirit: “The preacher’s mouth and the words that I hear are not his; they are the words and the message of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>6</sup> However, reaching a healthy understanding of Martin Luther’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit is no easy task. Arnold Carlson laments,

When we wish to understand what Luther believed and taught concerning justification by faith, we go to his expositions of Romans or Galatians, or to the little tract on Christian Liberty, or to the shorter summaries in the Catechisms. When we seek to uncover what Luther believed and taught concerning the Holy Spirit our task is not quite so simple. Nowhere has he systematically summarized his teachings on this subject.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 220.

<sup>5</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 22, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapters 1-4* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), 528.

<sup>6</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 24, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapters 14-16*, trans. Martin H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 170.

<sup>7</sup>Arnold E. Carlson, “Luther and the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” *Lutheran*

To make matters even more difficult, when the reformer did delve into pneumatology he usually was correcting doctrinal abuse, rather than delivering a systematic treatment on the subject.

Despite these difficulties, one cannot study Luther's theology without regularly encountering his pneumatology. Regin Prenter, in his seminal work on Luther's pneumatology, contends, "The concept of the Holy Spirit completely dominates Luther's theology."<sup>8</sup> A. Skevington Wood defends this thesis because "Luther was no merely academic theologian. He was concerned through his reforming career with the relevance and application of doctrine to life. For him theology was an urgently practical and not simply a theoretical discipline."<sup>9</sup> Truly Luther was, in the words of Paul Tillich, "Spirit-determined and Spirit-directed."<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps no sphere of Luther's life was more "Spirit-determined and Spirit-directed" than the pulpit. To borrow from Prenter, the concept of the Holy Spirit completely dominated not merely Luther's theology, but his *homiletic*. From beginning to end, he saw the preaching enterprise as a Spirit-controlled event. Preaching is not so much the task of the preacher as it is the task of the Spirit.

The presence of the Holy Spirit was essential to Luther's study. In a letter to his friend George Spalatin, he wrote,

To begin with, it is absolutely certain that one cannot enter into the [meaning of] Scripture by study or innate intelligence. Therefore your first task is to begin with prayer. You must ask that the Lord in his great mercy grant you a true understanding of his words, should it please him to accomplish anything through you for his glory

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*Quarterly* 11 (May 1959): 135.

<sup>8</sup>Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), ix.

<sup>9</sup>A. Skevington Wood, "Spirit and Spirituality in Luther," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 61 (1989): 313.

<sup>10</sup>Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 3:250.

and not for your glory or that of any other man. For there is no one who can teach the divine words except he who is their author, as he says: "They shall all be taught of God." You must therefore completely despair of your own diligence and intelligence and rely solely on the infusion of the Spirit. Believe me, for I have had experience in this matter.<sup>11</sup>

Sermon preparation does not begin with diligence, but with despair. The preacher must begin, not with what he knows, but with *who* he needs. The preacher must begin with despair in self and desperation for the Spirit.

Luther's insistence on the necessity of the Spirit was no isolated rambling, but was fundamental to his hermeneutic. Elsewhere he stated, "To understand [Scripture] is not merely to know the words and the grammar, and to reach the literal meaning, though all this has its place and use; it is to enter into its real meaning and to feel its living power as imparted by the Spirit of Christ."<sup>12</sup> Luther urged preachers to "kneel down in your little room and pray to God with real humility and earnestness, that he through his dear Son may give you his Holy Spirit, who will enlighten you, lead you, and give you understanding."<sup>13</sup> The Spirit is necessary for none can achieve true knowledge of the Scriptures by his own efforts. Luther observed, "Be assured that no one can make a Doctor of the Holy Scripture, except the Holy Spirit from heaven."<sup>14</sup> The preacher must begin on his knees, asking the Spirit for true understanding.

Luther understood the importance of man's role in sermon preparation and delivery, but he also knew that apart from the Spirit all human effort was meaningless. Lawson explains, "Luther was a brilliant scholar, well-grounded in Scripture, but he

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<sup>11</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 48, *Letters 1*, ed. Gottfried G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 53–54.

<sup>12</sup>As quoted in Steven J. Lawson, *The Heroic Boldness of Martin Luther* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2013), 57.

<sup>13</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 34, *Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 285–86.

<sup>14</sup>Martin Luther, *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), 474.

knew he was completely dependent on the Spirit to illumine his mind in the study of a passage."<sup>15</sup> From the study to the sermon, Luther's understanding of preaching was directed by the Holy Spirit.

### **Text-Driven**

Some may question Luther's theology of the sermon. If God speaks through the Spirit-directed sermon, is the evangelical understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture at risk? If God has already said all he intended to say through Scripture, in what sense can he continue to speak through sermons today? Furthermore, does the Spirit speak through all Christian preaching? What barometer can determine the validity of a Christian sermon? Meuser clarifies Luther's position,

Christian preaching — when it is faithful to the word of God in the Scriptures about our need and God's response to it — is God speaking. When it focuses on what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ, it is God speaking. When it invites faith and presents Christ so that faith becomes possible, it is God speaking. It is God's very own audible address to all who hear it, just as surely as if Christ himself had spoken it.<sup>16</sup>

Pelikan agrees, "Luther also taught that the oral 'proclamation' of the Word of God needed the written Word in the Scriptures if it was to be preserved from error."<sup>17</sup>

Wilson adds, "God is active in preaching insofar as the preacher remains obedient to the Word and seeks nothing but for the people to hear the Word of God."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, God binds his presence in preaching to the *material* of Scripture, not the man. God speaks through the sermons driven by the text of Scripture.

Luther further explained this truth in a sermon from John 6: "Whenever you hear anyone boast that he has something by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and it has no

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<sup>15</sup>Lawson, *Heroic Boldness*, 58.

<sup>16</sup>Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 12.

<sup>17</sup>Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor*, 224.

<sup>18</sup>Wilson, "Luther on Preaching as God Speaking," 69.

basis in God's Word, no matter what it may be, tell him that this is the work of the devil."<sup>19</sup> In other words, the Spirit inextricably links his voice to God's Word. Paul Althaus summarizes this with two propositions: "(1) The Spirit does not speak without the word. (2) The Spirit speaks through and in the word."<sup>20</sup> Luther believed that although God *could* speak to his people apart from the Word, he *chose* not to do so because "it has pleased God not to give the Spirit without the Word, but through the Word; that he might have us as workers together with him."<sup>21</sup>

The implications of Luther's homiletic are clear: if the Spirit speaks through sermons that rightly exposit Scripture, the task of preaching is monumentally important. Such primacy of the Spirit in the sermon may lead some preachers to conclude that they have nothing meaningful to contribute. However, Luther's homiletic offered no provision for laziness in the pulpit. Meuser explains, "When the preacher speaks, God is really present and speaking. In the sermon one actually encounters God. That makes preaching . . . a most dangerous business."<sup>22</sup>

If preaching is a dangerous business, the preacher must approach the preparation and delivery of sermons with extreme care and diligence. As in many other areas of Luther's life, sermon preparation required extraordinary discipline and focus:

Some pastors and preachers are lazy and no good. They do not pray; they do not study; they do not read; they do not search the Scripture . . . as if there was no need to read the Bible for this purpose. . . . They are nothing but parrots and jackdaws. . . . The call is: watch, study, attend to reading. In truth, you cannot read too much in Scripture, and what you read you cannot read too carefully, and what you read carefully you cannot understand too well, and what you understand well you cannot teach too well, and what you teach well you cannot live too well . . . Therefore, dear

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<sup>19</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 23, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapters 6-8*, ed. Daniel E. Poellot (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 173.

<sup>20</sup>Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 36.

<sup>21</sup>Martin Luther, WA, 18: 695, quoted in *ibid.*, n. 7.

<sup>22</sup>Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 13.

sirs and brothers, pastors and preachers, pray, read, study, be diligent . . . this evil, shameful time is not the season for being lazy, for sleeping and snoring.<sup>23</sup>

The sermon will not become Spirit-directed or text-driven automatically. On the contrary, such sermons only materialize when the preacher immerses himself in the text. Luther explained,

Of the letters of the princes it has been said that they should be read three times. But the letters of God (for so St. Gregory calls Scripture) are to be read three times, seven times, yes seventy times seven times, or . . . an infinite number of times. Because they are divine wisdom which cannot be so easily comprehended at first glance. If . . . anyone reads Scripture casually, as well-known and easy material, he is deceiving himself . . . by no means imagine that you know it. In the morning read a psalm or other Scripture and study it for a while. That is what I do. When I get up in the morning I recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer with the children, adding any one of the Psalms. I do this only . . . to keep myself well-acquainted with these matters and I do not want to let the mildew of the notion grow that I know them well enough. The devil is a greater rascal than you think. You do not as yet know what sort of fellow he is and what a desperate rogue you are. His definite design is to get you tired of the word . . . draw you away from it. This is his aim.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, without intentional and consistent immersion in the text, the preacher will not deliver text-driven sermons.

### **Christ-Centered**

What are the implications of the text-driven sermon? For Luther, focusing on the text of Scripture meant centering the sermon on Christ. Kiessling explains,

He made the sermon Scriptural in a sense it had never been before. In Luther's opinion this was tantamount to making it Christocentric. Its content was to be based on Scripture and on Scripture only. The holy legends, the church tradition, the canon law, and the pronouncements of the pope were no longer to have a place in it. The plan at Wittenberg, as later at Geneva, was to preach on the whole Bible or at least on the chief parts of the Bible consecutively, in order to show the Christian congregation "how much more wonderful the Word of God was than the words of men."<sup>25</sup>

Luther's threefold emphases on the essentiality of the Spirit, the preeminence of the

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<sup>23</sup>WA, 53: 218, quoted in Meuser, *Luther the Preacher*, 40–41.

<sup>24</sup>WA, 32: 64–65, quoted in *ibid.*, 43–44.

<sup>25</sup>Elmer Carl Kiessling, *The Early Sermons of Luther and Their Relation to the Pre Reformation Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1935), 147–48.

sermon (God's Word), and the necessity of Scripture were, in his mind, intrinsically Christ-centered. Christ is the Eternal Word; therefore, accurately preaching the Word of God was equivalent to accurately preaching Christ. In other words, the Spirit's *message* to the hearer through the Scripture centers on Christ.

Like many of his redemptive-historical successors, Luther did not believe it was possible to explain a text rightly apart from its relationship to Christ. On one occasion he asked, "Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what will you find left in them?"<sup>26</sup> As Lawson aptly responds, "the answer, obviously, is nothing."<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere he states in a discussion on Old Testament law, "everything should point to Christ."<sup>28</sup> In fact, Luther considered the Old Testament to be "the swaddling cloths and the manger in which Christ lies."<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, Luther's christocentricity is different from his redemptive-historical counterparts on several points. First, Luther had a different starting point. As aforementioned, most RH literature highlights passages like Luke 24:27 or 1 Corinthians 1:23 to prove an internal argument within Scripture to testify of its christocentricity. For Luther, this would be putting the cart before the horse. Scripture is not interpreted christocentrically because of a self-attestation, but because Christ is superior and more precious than Scripture. Whereas RHP begins with Scripture and looks to Christ, Luther began with Christ as supremely valuable and then interpreted Scripture in light of that greater reality.

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<sup>26</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 33, *Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 26.

<sup>27</sup>Lawson, *Heroic Boldness*, 72.

<sup>28</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 58, *Sermons V*, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2010), 432.

<sup>29</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 236.

While the distinction between these two approaches may seem inconsequential, the methodological impact is significant. When the homiletician begins with an internal argument within Scripture, as does the RH school, he approaches Scripture searching for Christ within its pages. With Luther's starting point, the homiletician approaches Scripture with confidence in its ontological reality as a testament of Christ. Scripture is ontologically Christ-centered; therefore, the preacher senses no burden to labor in locating a connection to Christ. Whether he preaches law or gospel the preacher who faithfully exposts the text *is* preaching Christ, since the word of God is a living testament to the Word.

Luther's christocentricity also differs from RHP in the means employed to proclaim Christ. Whereas most redemptive-historical advocates would eschew the use of biblical exemplars, Luther utilized exemplaristic preaching *en route* to preaching Christ. For example, Luther's exemplaristic use of Christ is diametrically opposed to the redemptive-historical scorn for any biblical exemplars.<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Pennington explains,

Once we have grasped Christ at this "higher level," [i.e., as a gift] we can also understand the Gospels as providing an *example* to follow in Christ. Luther is opposed to seeing Jesus as a new Moses, yet he perceives clearly that once we have received Christ as gift, we *can* find in the Gospels clear models to follow in our own growth in grace. . . . If we *only* have Jesus as an example, then "Christ is no more help to you than some other saint." But once we have him as gift, "it is necessary that you turn this [gift] into an example and deal with your neighbor in the very same way, be given also to him as a gift and an example."<sup>31</sup>

The order Luther employed is important. First, one should receive Christ as a gift. In his 1522 *Kirchenpostille* he explained,

See to it that you derive from the Gospel not only enjoyment of the story as such,

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<sup>30</sup>Even the most moderate redemptive-historical proponents urge considerable caution in preaching Christ as an example for the believer. Cf. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 290.

<sup>31</sup>Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 145.

for that does not last long. Nor should you derive from it only an example, for that does not hold up without faith. But see to it that you make his birth your own, and that you make an exchange with him, so that you rid yourself of your birth and receive, instead his.<sup>32</sup>

Luther rightly understood that the preacher must offer Christ as a gift to receive *before* presenting him as an example to follow. Nevertheless, Christ's function as exemplar must not be avoided. Many redemptive-historical exclusivists are leery of the exemplaristic value of the Savior and his saints.<sup>33</sup> Luther considered Jesus' role as example to be essential to proper Christian preaching.

Moreover, contrary to conventional wisdom, Luther's homiletic was not tantamount to christological eisegesis.<sup>34</sup> This approach was prevalent in his early ministry, but it is not reflective of his mature homiletic. As James Preus aptly demonstrates, Luther's "hermeneutical shift" during his lectures on the Psalms moved him *from* a christo-eisegetical rendering of Scripture *to* a hermeneutic that allowed him to interpret passages in their own right.<sup>35</sup> How then does the sermon rightly center on Christ? For Luther, the preacher rightly expressed the christocentricity of a text through the languages of law and gospel.

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<sup>32</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 52, *Sermons II*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 16. Emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Bryan Chapell who states, "A difficulty with much biographical preaching, however, is that it typically fails to honor the care that the Bible also takes to tarnish almost every patriarch or saint within its pages. Neither do we help others by encouraging them to be like Jesus if we do not simultaneously remind them that his standards are always beyond them, apart from his enabling grace." Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 290.

<sup>34</sup>For example, Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 125–26.

<sup>35</sup>James S. Preus, "Old Testament Promissio in Luther's New Hermeneutic," *Harvard Theological Review* 60 (1967): 145–61; cf. James Samuel Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1969).

## Law/Gospel-Expressed

The faithful sermon is not merely the recitation of a christocentric interpretation of Scripture. The preacher must communicate the text in God's way. If the Spirit is speaking through the sermon, then the preacher must be careful not only to communicate God's words accurately, but also to speak accurately in the *manner* God speaks. Fundamental to Luther's thought is his belief that God speaks of Christ in two ways: through the language of law and the language of gospel. Therefore, the faithful sermon will strive to communicate Christ by expressing both languages. As Richard Lischer explains, "No matter what their order of presentation, gospel and law (or vice versa) still sound the two tones of God's holy word."<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps no element of Luther's theology has received wider recognition than his distinction between law and gospel.<sup>37</sup> One of his pupils once claimed, "No other teacher had ever given clearer and more understandable instruction regarding the proper distinction of law and gospel . . . than had Martin Luther."<sup>38</sup> The reformer himself opined, "Whoever knows well how to distinguish the gospel from the law should give thanks to God and know that he is a real theologian."<sup>39</sup>

Contrary to prevailing opinions, Luther's law and gospel dialectic was not a

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<sup>36</sup>Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 40.

<sup>37</sup>For example, see Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, ed. Victor I. Gruhn, trans. Eric W. Gritsch and Ruth C. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 120–79; Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 267–76; Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 251–73; Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 110–24.

<sup>38</sup>As quoted in Robert Kolb, "The Noblest Skill in the Christian Church': Luther's Sermons on the Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 71 (2007): 301.

<sup>39</sup>Luther, *LW*, 23: 115.

hermeneutical grid used to interpret Scripture.<sup>40</sup> The law and gospel represent two different ways God speaks to people. As Forde writes, “Law and gospel . . . do not designate merely aspects or parts of the text but the manner in which the text functions relative to the hearer.”<sup>41</sup> Trueman adds, “The distinction refers to how the Bible is *applied*.”<sup>42</sup> The law is any word of God that kills or commands and the gospel is any word of God that makes alive or provides. With the law, God kills, crushes, and pulverizes the sinner. He exposes his insufficiencies, and reveals his incompleteness. With the gospel, God raises the hearer back to life. God provides what he demands and fills what is lacking.

Many preachers mistakenly assume that certain passages are primarily law passages and others are primarily gospel passages. This error often appears in the belief that the Old Testament is concerned primarily with law and the New Testament with gospel. Bernhard Lohse writes, “Most texts assigned to the law have also a gospel side, just as most texts assigned to the gospel have also a law side.”<sup>43</sup> Luther’s preaching demonstrated this truth. When he preached the law of the Ten Commandments, Luther found gospel in the phrase “I am the Lord, thy God.” When he preached the gospel of the cross, Luther found law in the severity of God’s wrath against sin. Every text contains both law and gospel because every text testifies to the incompleteness of man and God’s

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<sup>40</sup>Luther derived his antithesis from Saint Augustine’s letter-spirit distinction. Although he initially understood the letter and spirit as a “hermeneutical divide” between the Old and New Testaments, his mature doctrine of law and gospel is reflected here. For further study on Luther’s doctrinal development in this area, see Wai-Shing Chau, *The Letter and the Spirit: A History of Interpretation from Origen to Luther*, American University Studies, 7 (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

<sup>41</sup>Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 154.

<sup>42</sup>Carl R. Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 91.

<sup>43</sup>Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 269.

provision to make him complete.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, the goal of the sermon, for Luther, was not merely to speak accurate words *for* God, but to speak in an accurate *manner*. If God speaks through the languages of law and gospel, the preacher must rightly employ those languages in the pulpit. Gerhard Forde opines, “The difference between ‘old law’ and ‘new law (gospel)’ is a difference in *speaking*.”<sup>45</sup> He continues, “Law and gospel, as Luther understood them, are more a matter of modes of speech and ways of preaching than of difference in content between Old and New Testaments.”<sup>46</sup> The chief end of Luther's sermons was to speak God's message in God's manner. In other words, his goal was to communicate law and gospel accurately to his people.

### **Hearer-Sensitive**

Faithful preaching relies on the Holy Spirit, God's *means* for speaking. It is text-driven, rightly communicating the *material* of Scripture. It is Christ-centered, focusing on the Savior as its central *message*. It is law/gospel-expressed, using the dialectic to speak God's Word in an accurate *manner*. However, what *method* must the preacher employ in his attempt to rightly communicate God's Word to his people? Luther rightly understood that preaching must be hearer-sensitive.

For Luther, hearer-sensitivity did not imply timid preaching. Even a brief glance at the actual preaching of the reformer is sufficient to eradicate such an idea. He

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<sup>44</sup>A modern reincarnation of the principle that all texts contain both law and gospel appears in Bryan Chapell's “Fallen Condition Focus.” He says, “The Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) is the mutual human condition [i.e. law] that contemporary believers share with those to whom the text was written that requires the grace [i.e. gospel] of the passage for God's people to glorify and enjoy him.” Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 48-53.

<sup>45</sup>Gerhard O. Forde, “Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic,” *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 240. Emphasis original.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

was no stranger to “stepping on the toes” of his hearers. On the contrary, hearer-sensitivity is borne out of pastoral concern and love of neighbor. This final component of a faithful sermon is manifest in two areas. First, the preacher must be sensitive to the intellectual status of his hearers. Second, the preacher must be sensitive to the congregational context of his hearers.

Luther was no fan of cerebral sermons. At the table with his friends he once remarked, “Nobody understands a sermon that is turgid, deep, removed from life. . . . Christ could have taught in a profound way, but he wished to deliver his message with the utmost simplicity in order that the common people might hear and understand.”<sup>47</sup> Preachers should proclaim God’s Word in such a way that a child could understand. In other words, the preacher must be sensitive to the intellectual status of his hearers.

The preacher must also be sensitive to his congregational context. Luther believed that no preacher could do more damage than he who preached law to a broken, gospel-thirsty congregation or gospel to a lazy, lawless congregation. Hearer-sensitivity in the pulpit requires the preacher to exegete the audience, not just the text. Luther explained this position in his dispute against the antinomians: “Our view has been right up to now and ought to remain: If you see people afflicted and contrite, preach Christ to them, preach grace, as much as you can; but not to the secure, the lazy, the licentious, adulterers, and blasphemers. If you don’t follow this advice, you will be guilty of their sins.”<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the preacher who rightly proclaims law and gospel knows not merely what the text *says*, but what his congregation *needs*.

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<sup>47</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 54, *Table Talk*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 383–84.

<sup>48</sup>As quoted in James F. McCue, “Luther and the Problem of Popular Preaching,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16, no. 1 (1985): 38.

## Evaluating the Sermon

Which of these characteristics is most suited to evaluate the faithfulness of a sermon? Should the evaluation employ these six criteria in concert, or does one or more criterion rise to the foreground? According to Luther, the law-gospel paradigm is of first importance in evaluating the faithfulness of a sermon. Again, this is not to suggest a *de facto* superiority, but simply superiority as a metric for homiletical fidelity. In other words, each component is essential and interconnected, but the law-gospel paradigm is most preferable to gauge the faithfulness of the sermon.

The other five criteria in and of themselves are insufficient to measure the fidelity of a sermon. The “God-spokenness” of a sermon is inadequate since it is primarily an ontological reality, not a gauge to measure pulpit effectiveness. The faithful sermon does not *strive* to present the Word of God; it *is* the Word of God. The “Spirit-directedness” of a sermon fails as a measure because ascertaining the Spirit's presence in the sermon is not easily accomplished. The “text-drivenness” of a sermon is measurable, but Luther would likely reject this as a primary metric since often what *seems* to be expositional fails because it does not sufficiently focus on Christ.<sup>49</sup> The “Christ-centeredness” of a sermon is also measurable, but often what appears to be Christ-centered is not. Hence, Luther rebuked the antinomians for neglecting “that other part of the preaching of Christ”<sup>50</sup> with their imbalanced sermons that omitted the law. The

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<sup>49</sup>For example, in his 1545 sermon on John 5:39-43, Luther explained, "So, then, Christ's words to the Pharisees are as much as to say: 'Since you have so much light, see that you study diligently in the Holy Scriptures, abide in the Scriptures, and go on seeking eternal life in them, just as you have begun to do. But I will give you a marvelous gloss and interpretation of Holy Scripture, which you do not yet know, so that you may read Scripture correctly and not go astray, namely this: See to it that you purify your eyes and open them aright, and then study the Scriptures so as to find Me, Me in them. Whoever reads the Scriptures so that he finds Me in them is the true master of the Scriptures. . . . But if you do not find me therein, then truly, you have not rightly understood and studied them, and you do not have eternal life.'" Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 58, *Sermons V*, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2010), 248. Cf. *ibid.*, 432.

<sup>50</sup>As quoted in *ibid.*, 37–38.

“hearer-sensitivity” of a sermon fails as an ultimate measure since its manifestation is relative to the particular congregation.

Therefore, the most suitable measure to evaluate the faithfulness of the sermon is the dialectical expression of law and gospel. However, it is dangerous to overstate the importance of the law-gospel paradigm. Luther's homiletic is not reducible to the dialectic alone, as if merely layering law and gospel over a sermon was sufficient. Law and gospel are consequential to the other essential components and cannot be rightly understood apart from them. Therefore, a right conception of the paradigm is tethered to, not divorced from, Luther's entire homiletic. His law-gospel paradigm is the apex of an entire homiletical ecosystem. It cannot rightly exist apart from the other essential components of his homiletic. Nevertheless, although law and gospel cannot be understood apart from the other marks of a faithful sermon, the faithfulness of a sermon cannot be properly measured without the paradigm.

### **The Primacy of Law and Gospel**

The primacy of the law-gospel paradigm in evaluating Christian sermons is distinctive from the redemptive-historical school, which evaluates the sermon primarily on its presentation of Christ within the redemptive storyline of Scripture. Luther's model is not *less* christocentric than the redemptive-historical model, but it measures christocentricity differently. For Luther, the law-gospel motif reveals a street-level view of the genuine Christ-centeredness of a sermon. In fact, Luther believed a preacher's entire ministry could be evaluated based on his adherence (or lack thereof) to the law-gospel paradigm: “Whoever knows well how to distinguish the gospel from the law should give thanks to God and know that he is a real theologian.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians Chapters 1-4* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 115. Elsewhere he said, "Distinguishing between the Law and the Gospel is the highest art in Christendom." Martin Luther, "The Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel: A Sermon by Martin Luther January 1, 1532," trans. Willard L. Burce, *Concordia Journal* 18 (1992): 153–63.

If proper adherence to the law-gospel paradigm is the apex of Luther's homiletic, one must properly understand its unique contours. Moreover, one must understand how rightly to discern between law and gospel. Furthermore, the diverse manifestations of law and gospel must be grasped.

### **Command and Promise**

The law is any word of God that kills or commands and the gospel is any word of God that makes alive or provides. With the law, God kills, crushes, and pulverizes the sinner. He exposes his insufficiencies, and reveals his incompleteness. With the gospel, God raises the hearer back to life. God provides what he demands and fills what is lacking. Scripture kills and commands with the law and promises and provides with the gospel. Stephen Westerholm explains,

In his most typical references to "law," Luther has in mind neither the law of nature as such nor the Mosaic code, but Scripture wherever it places requirements on people, all that "we are to do and give to God" (Moses, 35:162). The whole of Scripture can be treated under two headings: command and promise (Freedom, 31:348), or — in Luther's preferred terminology — law and gospel.<sup>52</sup>

In his famous sermon, *How Christians Should Regard Moses*, Luther himself explained, "The gospel teaches exclusively what has been given us by God, and not—as in the case of the law—what we are to do and give to God."<sup>53</sup>

### **The Twofold Promise of the Gospel**

The promise of the gospel is essentially twofold. First, the gospel promises justification by faith. For example, in his sermon on three kinds of righteousness, Luther explained "Here he has set Christ before us and promised that he who believes in him and calls on his name shall at once receive the Holy Spirit."<sup>54</sup> Second, the gospel promises

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<sup>52</sup>Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 27–29.

<sup>53</sup>Luther, *LW*, 35: 162.

<sup>54</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, *The Christian in Society I*, ed. James  
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grace to accomplish sanctification.<sup>55</sup> In his final sermon, Luther remarked that God “give[s] you the Spirit, so that the burden, which for the world would be unbearable, becomes for you a light burden.”<sup>56</sup> This twofold promise is visible in contrast to the twofold imperative of the law. Carrick explains, “Just as the indicative mood has *two foci* in the New Testament, so too the imperative mood has *two foci*. The focus of the initial imperative is clearly upon repentance and faith. . . . The focus of the *subsequent* imperative is upon sanctification and the requirements of Christian ethics.”<sup>57</sup> If the initial legal command is repentance and faith, the initial gospel promise is justification. If the subsequent legal command is sanctification and Christian ethics, the subsequent gospel promise is the grace to accomplish it.

One must be careful to distinguish between gospel *proper*—that is, the redemptive message of salvation through Christ’s atonement—and “gospel” in Luther’s dialectic. When Luther presented the gospel dialectic in his preaching, it was not always gospel proper; sometimes it was nothing more than explaining and applying a promise of God.<sup>58</sup> For example, in a sermon on Luke 2:1-14 Luther encouraged his hearers that in Christ they knew “nothing but laughter and joy in the heart of the Father.”<sup>59</sup> The

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Atkinson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 241.

<sup>55</sup>Some might contend that a third gospel promise—the promise of glorification—should also be considered. However, the promise of glorification and the promise of sanctification are inextricably connected. In other words, the promise of grace to accomplish sanctification *is* a promise that complete sanctification (i.e., glorification) will occur.

<sup>56</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 392.

<sup>57</sup>John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 84–86. Emphasis original.

<sup>58</sup>These promises are always resultant from gospel proper, but they do not necessarily include an explicit articulation of the atonement to qualify as “gospel.” Because the gospel reality of Christ’s atonement purchased these promises, the gospel label in Luther’s dialectic is accurate.

<sup>59</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein

explanation and application of similar grace-bought promises are the heart of what it means to preach gospel.

### **The Threefold Use of the Law**

Wilhelm Andersen asserts, "Law is a good gift of God to man, yet . . . it brings with it deadly dangers that are inseparable from it."<sup>60</sup> One of those dangers is attempting to define Luther's understanding of law in a sea of alternatives. Two general categories best summarize the options.<sup>61</sup> Some define Luther's concept of law by its accusatory *function*. For instance, Gerhard Ebeling states, "Law is not . . . an idea or a collection of propositions but the reality of fallen humanity."<sup>62</sup> Gerhard Forde suggests, "Law is *anything* which frightens or accuses 'the conscience.'"<sup>63</sup> Markus Wriedt opines, "By law Luther understands all statements of Scripture that uncover the sin of humans and accuse them."<sup>64</sup> What unites these definitions is the suggestion that law is discernible not by what it *says* but by what it *does*—namely, it accuses the sinner.

Others define Luther's concept of law by its imperatival *content*. Robert Kolb

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(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 216.

<sup>60</sup>Wilhelm Andersen, *Law and Gospel: A Study in Biblical Theology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961), 17.

<sup>61</sup>David Lose highlights this division between content and function: "In order to appreciate Luther's understanding of the law, we must note that he treats it always with regard to its functions. That is, Luther does not consider the law primarily in terms of particular codes of conduct but rather as the distinct means by which God achieves certain ends. You recognize the law, from this point of view, not simply from what it says (content) but from what it does (function)." "Martin Luther on Preaching the Law," *Word & World* 21 (2001): 254.

<sup>62</sup>As quoted in Gerhard O. Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969), 177.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.* Emphasis original.

<sup>64</sup>Markus Wriedt, "Luther's Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 107.

argues, "Divine expectations for human creatures are what Luther called 'law.'"<sup>65</sup> Althaus claims, "Law is the eternal will of God."<sup>66</sup> Ernest Reisinger asserts, "This word 'law' . . . signifies any doctrine, instruction, law, ordinance, or statute, divine or human, which teaches, directs, commands, or binds men to any duty which they owe to God or man."<sup>67</sup> What unites these definitions is an objective content embedded in law that distinguishes it from gospel, be it an instruction, an expectation, or an expressed desire.

In fact, Luther viewed both content and function as characteristic of the law. The imperatival *content* of law is visible in his sermon on the distinction between law and gospel:

By the term "Law" nothing else is to be understood than a word of God that is a command, that enjoins upon us what we are to do and what we are to shun, that requires from us some work of obedience. . . . Law is to be called and to be, anything that refers to what we are to do. . . . The Law makes demands of things that we are to do; it insists on works that we are to perform in the service of God and our fellow-men. . . . Thus the Law and the Gospel are distinguished as to their formal statements: the one promises, the other commands. The Gospel gives and bids us take; the Law demands and says, "This you are to do."<sup>68</sup>

In other words, the link between law and commands is inextricable. Nevertheless, this does not restrict the law to sermonic imperatives. The law often appears in an indicative form, not commanding *per se*, but revealing the sinner's inability to do or be what the law commands. This accusing *function* of the law is evident in the first two uses of the law. In his commentary on Galatians, Luther explained,

It is no small matter then to understand rightly what the law is, and what is the true use and office thereof. . . . first to bridle civil transgressions, and then to reveal and to increase spiritual transgressions. Wherefore the law is also a light, which sheweth and revealeth, not the grace of God, not righteousness and life; but sin, death, the

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<sup>65</sup>Robert Kolb, "Luther in an Age of Confessionalization." Ibid, 223.

<sup>66</sup>Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 252.

<sup>67</sup>Ernest C. Reisinger, *The Law and the Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 48.

<sup>68</sup>Quoted by C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), 23–24.

wrath and judgment of God.<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, the law for Luther is discernible not just by what it *says*, but by what it *does*. This is further evident by reflecting on the individual uses of the law.

**The first use of the law.** The first use of the law is a bridle, designed by God to *restrain* sin—often referred to as the civil use of the law. In its civil use, the law “compel[s] civility through legal restraint and the threat of punishment.”<sup>70</sup> Luther explained this in his commentary on Galatians: “as a mad or a wild beast is bound, lest he should destroy: even so the law doth bridle a mad and furious man, that he sin not after his own lust. . . . The first use of the law then is to bridle wickedness.”<sup>71</sup> Whenever men and women live in outright disobedience they are rebelling against the first use of the law.

**The second use of the law.** The second use of the law is a mirror, designed by God to *reveal* sin—often referred to as the theological use of the law. In its theological use, the law “not only sets up and enforces standards of civility but also accuses those who disobey it and thereby makes offenders aware of their sin and consequent need for forgiveness.”<sup>72</sup> In his Galatians commentary, Luther explained, “Another use of the law is divine and spiritual, which is to increase transgressions, that is to say, to reveal unto a man his sin, his blindness, his misery, his iniquity, his ignorance, hatred and contempt of God, death, hell, judgment, and the deserved wrath of God.”<sup>73</sup> Whenever men and women live in outright pride regarding the law of God they are rebelling against its

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<sup>69</sup>Dillenberger, *Martin Luther*, 144.

<sup>70</sup>Lose, “Martin Luther on Preaching the Law,” 254.

<sup>71</sup>Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, ed. John Prince Fallowes, trans. Erasmus Middleton (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1979), 189.

<sup>72</sup>Lose, “Martin Luther on Preaching the Law,” 255.

<sup>73</sup>Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 189.

second use.

**The third use of the law.** No small disagreement persists between those who advocate two uses of the law in Luther and those who insist on a third use.<sup>74</sup> For decades, the "only-two-uses"<sup>75</sup> position has enjoyed a scholarly consensus with support from many of the most reputable Luther scholars.<sup>76</sup> Some challenged this consensus,<sup>77</sup> but a

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<sup>74</sup>Other scholars advocate a singular function of the law in Luther's thought: to accuse the sinner. For example, see F. E. Mayer, "Human Will in Bondage and Freedom: A Study in Luther's Distinction of Law and Gospel," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 22 (1951): 785–819. Some use a key phrase from the Augsburg Confession to justify this approach—*lex semper accusat*, "the law always accuses." This phrase appears throughout the Confession. See, for example, Article IV where it appears nearly a dozen times. Theodore Gerhardt Tappert, trans., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1959), 112–56.

<sup>75</sup>Credit to Edward Engelbrecht for the "only-two-uses" nomenclature. Edward A. Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law: Luther's Use of the Law for Christian Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 6. Engelbrecht also notes that the scholarly consensus did not always reject a threefold use of the law. In the early twentieth century, the scholarly consensus supported a threefold use, led by scholars like Kawerau, Seeberg, Loofs, and Aner. *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>76</sup>Engelbrecht includes a helpful list of recent and current scholars who reject a third use: Paul Althaus, Heinrich Bornkamm, Gerhard Ebeling, Werner Elert, Ragnar Bring, Anders Nygren, Lennart Pinomaa, Regin Prenter, Gustaf Wingren, Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, Oswald Bayer, Bengt Hägglund, Lauri Haikola, Gerhard Heintze, Wilifried Joest, and Martin Schloemann. Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law*, xiii. To Engelbrecht's list could be added Gerhard O. Forde, *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*, ed. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 152; Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 270–73; Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 157–58; Wayne G. Johnson, *Theological Method in Luther and Tillich: Law-Gospel and Correlation* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 13–18; Julius Köstlin, *The Theology of Luther: In Its Historical Development and Inner Harmony*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1897), 501–02; David J. Lose, "Luther and Calvin on Preaching to the Human Condition," *Lutheran Quarterly* 10 (1996): 281–318; Lose, "Martin Luther on Preaching the Law"; Dennis Ngien, "Theology of Preaching in Martin Luther," *Themelios* 28, no. 2 (2003): 33–39. Some scholars reject even the possibility of a third use in ardent terms. For example, Timothy Wengert, who labels the belief that the law is a guide as "the legalists 'third use' of the law." Timothy J. Wengert, *Harvesting Martin Luther's Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 10.

<sup>77</sup>For example, Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947), 605; Arthur H. Drevlow, "Law and Gospel in

comprehensive treatise had not emerged until Edward Engelbrecht's seminal work, *Friends of the Law: Luther's Use of the Law for the Christian Life*. Engelbrecht convincingly argued from historical theology that the notion of "uses" of the law was not an invention of Luther, as is commonly supposed. Engelbrecht explains,

Neither Luther nor Melanchthon was the first theologian to describe the use of the Law. . . . The doctrine and terminology are deeply rooted in biblical teaching and patristic theology. . . . Luther's unique contribution was to renew the distinction and to explain how it properly related to the chief article of the Christian Faith: justification."<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, the third use of the law was not a Melanchthonian innovation, as many contend, but a concept firmly established long before the Reformation.<sup>79</sup>

Engelbrecht states, "Melanchthon did not invent the idea of a third use as a doctrinal category. The idea and terminology of a threefold use of the Law came from medieval biblical interpretation and entered Reformation theology through Luther who early in his career described Christians as friends of the Law."<sup>80</sup> Engelbrecht then persuasively demonstrates throughout Luther's career substantial support for a third use of the law.

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Luther's Ministry," *Concordia Journal* 10 (July 1984): 130–39; Robert C. Johnson, *Authority in Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), 34; Eugene F. A Klug, "Luther on Law, Gospel, and the Third Use of the Law," *The Springfielder* 38 (1974): 155–69; Wilhelm Niesel, *The Gospel and the Churches: A Comparison of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism*, trans. David Lewis (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 216; Armin W. Schuetze, "On the Third Use of the Law, Luther's Position in the Antinomian Debate," in *No Other Gospel: Essays in Commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of the Formula of Concord*, ed. Arnold J. Koelpin (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1980), 207-27.

<sup>78</sup>Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law*, 9.

<sup>79</sup>Arwin Schuetze reached similar conclusions in his 1980 article. There he compared Article VI from the Formula of Concord, which explicates the Melanchthonian position on the third use, with Luther's writings. He concluded, "Article VI restates the views already expressed by Luther in numerous writings from various periods of his life." Schuetze, "On the Third Use of the Law, Luther's Position in the Antinomian Debate," 224.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*

The sermon analyses in the forthcoming chapters demonstrate findings that substantially bolster Engelbrecht's claims. The reformer's use of unqualified imperatives betrays a functional third use. Nonetheless, some might discredit this work in favor of the allegedly clear-cut evidence from Luther's theological writings that deny a third use of the law. Should not his theological writings deserve primacy over his preaching practices? Perhaps Luther simply neglects to follow his own philosophy of preaching. After all, what preacher is always thoroughly consistent? While Luther's theological writings may occasionally boast a greater clarity than his preaching, his sermons remain a vast resource worthy of equal consideration. Furthermore, one could reasonably conclude that Luther's pulpit *practice* should be the lens through which one best views his *theology* of law.

Others might object to the nomenclature employed in this study. The imperatives in Luther's preaching are not law, but *commandments*.<sup>81</sup> These commandments, some argue, are fundamentally different from the theological category *law*. The law always accuses and kills, therefore referring to law as a guide is "a category mistake."<sup>82</sup> Those who propose this distinction between law and commandment contend that commandments are imperatives grounded in the indicatives of the gospel, whereas the law always operates in opposition to the gospel. Nevertheless, the distinction between law and commandments only works when law is defined apart from its content, something which Luther himself refuses to do. For these reasons and more, this dissertation agrees with Engelbrecht's assessment that Luther did employ the third use of

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<sup>81</sup>Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 275; Kolb and Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church*, 157–58. See also Herman Stuempfle, who speaks of "the call to obedience" rather than referring to the third use as commandments or law. Herman G. Stuempfle Jr., *Preaching Law and Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 62–75.

<sup>82</sup>Tullian Tchividjian, "Luther On Law," The Gospel Coalition, *Liberate*, (September 12, 2011), accessed April 20, 2014, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tullian/2011/09/12/luther-on-law/>.

the law.

The third use of the law is a guide, designed by God to *redirect* the saved sinner toward holiness—often referred to as the moral use of the law. In its moral use, the law teaches Christians how to live. Luther proposes the third use in a lecture on 1 Timothy 1:8-9:

The third function, however, to remove sin and to justify, is limited to this: The Lamb of God, and not the Law, takes away sin. It is Christ who removes sin and justifies. Consequently, we must distinguish between the function of the Law and that of Christ. It is the Law's function to show good and evil, because it shows what one must do and reveals sin, which one must not commit. The Law therefore is good because it shows not only evil but also the good which one must do.<sup>83</sup>

Whenever Christians find in the law the power to justify, they are rebelling against the third use of the law.<sup>84</sup>

### **The Purpose of Law and Gospel**

Although law and gospel operate in different ways, they have a shared purpose: to direct the hearer to Christ. The gospel's ability to point the hearer to Christ is obvious. The law directs the hearer to Christ in two ways: through accusation and pedagogy. In its first two uses, the law accuses by constantly reminding the sinner of his sinfulness. The accusatory power of the law appears whenever the law is employed in its first use. Why does man need the law to curb his sin? Were it not for his utter wretchedness, the curb of the law would be unnecessary. When a sinner sees her sin in the mirror of God's law, she buckles under its damning accusations. She clearly and consistently falls short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). How then do these accusations

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<sup>83</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 28, *Selected Pauline Epistles* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 147. Luther scholars hotly debate the authenticity of this statement. Engelbrecht offers a convincing argument for its authenticity in *Friends of the Law*. For further critique in the same vein, see Klug, "Luther on Law, Gospel, and the Third Use of the Law."

<sup>84</sup>Luther writes, "Beware of making me righteous by the Law. Rather use it to restrain. You must not give the Law the power and virtue to justify." Luther, *LW*, 28: 231.

drive the hearer to Christ? It is only in Christ where the sinner's hope is found. Only in Christ will he begin to desire obedience apart from a regulatory curb. Only in Christ will she be declared righteous, apart from the works of the law (Rom 3:28).

Nevertheless, accusation is not alone in directing the sinner to Christ. In its third use, the law pedagogically directs the saint to Christ by teaching him the holiness "without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14)." By showing the Christian how to live in obedience to God's commands, the third use drives the sinner to Christ.

Therefore, while law and gospel are undoubtedly distinct, it is inappropriate to view them as foes. Indeed, these two languages are friends employing different means in their shared purpose to drive the hearer to Christ. Apart from Christ, the sinner knows nothing but enmity with the law, but in Christ the law—used lawfully—can become his friend (1 Tim 1:8). Luther himself wrote, "We are not free from the Law (as I have said above) in a human way, by which the Law is destroyed and changed, but in a divine and theological way, by which we are changed and from enemies of the Law are made friends of the Law."<sup>85</sup>

Some might contend that if the saints are made friends of the law in Christ, only the third use should be employed when preaching to Christians. Luther rightly understood that Christians are *simul iustus et peccator*; simultaneously justified and sinful.<sup>86</sup> David Lose explains, "Luther stresses the ongoing and simultaneous quality of God's work to put to death sinful persons and raise to life new persons in Christ."<sup>87</sup> God declares sinners righteous instantaneously upon conversion, but the Christian remains a

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<sup>85</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 27, *Lectures on Galatians Chapters 5-6* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 347.

<sup>86</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 25, *Lectures on Romans*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 336.

<sup>87</sup>David J. Lose, "Martin Luther on Preaching the Law," *Word & World* 21 (2001): 256.

sinner by nature. A perpetual inward battle characterizes this “dual nature of the Christian,” climaxing when “death itself puts an end to the contest and they are raised victorious with Christ.”<sup>88</sup> Therefore, the law must still be proclaimed in its first two uses to the Christian, since he retains a sinful nature. Nevertheless, the Christian is simultaneously justified and needs the third use to guide him in righteousness. As Engelbrecht writes, “the Law is one, while having different uses or functions depending on the state of those who hear it proclaimed.”<sup>89</sup>

### **Distinguishing among the Three Uses**

How then should these uses of the law be located in Luther’s sermons? The analyses herein employ the following general guidelines. The ultimate purpose of the law in each use is to drive the hearer to Christ, but each use also has a penultimate purpose. The penultimate purpose of the law in its first use is to restrain sin. Therefore, these threats of the law usually appear in a *conditional mood*. For example, in his seventh *Invocavit* sermon Luther warned, “If you will not love one another, God will send a great plague upon you.”<sup>90</sup> The purpose of this conditional threat was to stop sin in its tracks. However, the first use can also appear in the indicative mood. For example, in a sermon on Jude the reformer warned, “The Lord will punish these ungodly sinners because of their impudent and stubborn preaching.”<sup>91</sup> Although Luther employed the indicative mood, the context reveals the purpose of his statement: namely, to warn the sinner thereby curbing his sin.

The penultimate purpose of the law in its second use is to reveal the

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<sup>88</sup>Lose, “Martin Luther on Preaching the Law,” 256.

<sup>89</sup>Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law*, 10.

<sup>90</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 96.

<sup>91</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 30, *The Catholic Epistles*, ed. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 211.

wickedness of the sinner. In this sense, the second use of the law appears primarily in an *indicative mood*, explicating the sinfulness of the sinner. For example, in his first *Invocavit* sermon Luther declared, “You do not have the Spirit, even though you do have a deep knowledge of the Scriptures.”<sup>92</sup> The purpose of this indicative statement was to reveal the hypocrisy of his hearers.

The penultimate purpose of the law in its third use is to redirect the hearer towards holiness. The law as guide usually appears in the *imperative mood*. For example, in a sermon against drunkenness he commanded parents “to see to it that your children do not begin too early to fall into this vice.”<sup>93</sup> Words like “must,” “should,” and “ought” will frequently appear alongside the third use.

Nevertheless, the third use is not restricted to explicit imperatives. This use of the law can also appear in the indicative mood. For example, in another sermon Luther stated, “It is not sufficient for his salvation that a man merely refrain from doing harm and evil to his neighbor . . . . It is *required* rather that he be useful to him and benefit him.”<sup>94</sup> What is noteworthy in this indicative statement is the presence of an *implied imperative*.<sup>95</sup> The context of Luther’s remarks indicate he is not employing the indicative to threaten punishment (first use) or highlight wickedness (second use), but to promote obedience (third use). Therefore, the presence of imperatives (either implicit or explicit) characterizes the law in its third use.

The rhetorical analysis of the sermons considered also explores the twofold

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<sup>92</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 74.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 7. Emphasis added.

<sup>95</sup>The concept of *implied imperatives* is not original. Bruckner’s dissertation on implied imperatives in the book of Genesis thoroughly demonstrates the concept. James K. Bruckner, *Implied Law in the Abraham Narrative: A Literary and Theological Analysis* (New York: Sheffield Academic, 2001).

promise of the gospel with reference to the threefold use of the law. When the first use of the law threatens hell or damnation, it is in reference to the gospel promise of justification. When it threatens peace, security, comfort, or some other grace of God it appears in reference to the gospel promise of sanctification. When the second use accuses the hearer of unbelief, it is in reference to the gospel promise of justification. When it accuses the hearer of indwelling sin, it is in reference to the gospel promise of sanctification. When the third use commands the sinner to repent and believe, it appears in reference to the gospel promise of justification. When it commands the hearer to live in obedience, it appears in reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.

### Summary

Understanding Luther's homiletic is essential to understanding his preaching. He believed that the faithful sermon was God-spoken, Spirit-directed, text-driven, Christ-centered, law/gospel-expressed, and hearer-sensitive. Moreover, the law-gospel paradigm was of first importance in Luther's homiletic. As Kolb rightly notes, "to the end of his career . . . this pattern of law and gospel shaped and guided Luther's application of the biblical message."<sup>96</sup>

The medieval sermon was in many ways the polar opposite to Luther's mature homiletic. The reformer's conception of the sermon represented a radical and necessary shift towards a more biblical understanding of the pulpit. Perhaps another shift needs to occur today. The redemptive-historical homiletic is most noticeably different in its emphasis on gospel to the exclusion of law. Surprisingly, some believe this truncated gospel actually follows the pattern set by Luther. Carl Trueman explains,

The reception of Luther's thought in some evangelical quarters today would seem to reflect rather that against which Luther and the Wittenberg establishment are writing at this point. An overwhelming emphasis on grace and forgiveness is not to be

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<sup>96</sup>Robert Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 22.

found in Luther. It is always law *and* gospel, with the latter not being a soft or easy option, for the very reason that it is inseparably connected to the terror and fear associated with the former.<sup>97</sup>

Luther's *theology* of preaching aptly corrects this expositional imbalance. Still in question is the reality of his *practice*, to which the next chapter turns.

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<sup>97</sup>Carl Trueman, "Tools for the Trade" (Gheens Lecture, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, September 12, 2012).

CHAPTER 5  
LUTHER'S EARLY SERMONS: 1510-1521

This chapter analyzes the sermons of the early Luther. It begins with an analysis of what is arguably his first sermon, an exposition of Matthew 7:12 delivered in Erfurt sometime between 1510 and 1512. The second sermon is an exposition on Psalm 19:1 from December 1516. The third sermon is from Matthew 11:25-30, one of Luther's favorite passages.<sup>1</sup> Finally, it explores a sermon based on Exodus 25:9-27:18 preached in 1521, shortly before the Diet of Worms.

**Matthew 7:12**

Luther's exposition on Matthew 7:12 is arguably the earliest example of his preaching.<sup>2</sup> The exact date is unknown, but most scholars suggest either 1510 or 1512, with the latter date being more plausible.<sup>3</sup> Erich Vogelsang says, "It is the most penetrating sermon on Law and judgment which we have from the young Luther and is presumably the very earliest sermon of his we possess."<sup>4</sup> The sermon is based on Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 7:12).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This passage will appear in each main period of Luther's ministry, allowing one to trace any development in his homiletic practices.

<sup>2</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 5–13. Also, *WA*, 4: 590-95.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 5; Elmer Carl Kiessling, *The Early Sermons of Luther and Their Relation to the Pre Reformation Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1935), 68.

<sup>4</sup>As quoted in Luther, *LW*, 51: 5.

<sup>5</sup>All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

## Contextual Analysis

In late 1510 the young theologian traveled from Erfurt to Rome to help settle a dispute regarding the Augustinian order. There a disillusionment with the Eternal City began to fester, prompted by images of widespread corruption, including priestly ignorance and irreverence, frivolity, prostitution, homosexuality, and more.<sup>6</sup> Near the end of his visit, the young monk was overwhelmed with doubt. Upon climbing the Santa Scala on hands and knees, diligently kissing each step and repeating a *Pater Noster*, he lamented, “Who knows whether it is so?”<sup>7</sup>

Luther’s inner turmoil escalated upon his return from Rome in early 1511. Shortly thereafter his mentor, Johann von Staupitz, transferred him to Wittenberg. There Luther begrudgingly pursued his doctorate in theology, earning the degree on October 19, 1512. In this period Luther wrestled with *Anfechtung*, an intense spiritual and emotional upheaval. Roland Bainton explains,

Luther probed every resource of contemporary Catholicism for assuaging the anguish of a spirit alienated from God. He tried the way of good works and discovered that he could never do enough to save himself. He endeavored to avail himself of the merits of the saints and ended with a doubt, not a very serious or persistent doubt for the moment, but sufficient to destroy his assurance.<sup>8</sup>

This unrest spread beyond Luther’s personal life, also affecting his theology. Bernhard Lohse explains,

At several important points Luther was abandoning the framework of late medieval Occamist theology, above all its concept of sin. It is particularly against the Occamist definition of the relation between philosophy and theology that Luther was striking out on his own, and in doing so gleaned support from Augustine but also from the biblical statements. Equally significant is his comprehensive criticism

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<sup>6</sup>Roland Bainton records, “[Luther] was horrified to hear that if there were a hell Rome was built upon it. He need not have been a scandalmonger to know that the district of ill fame was frequented by ecclesiastics. He heard there were those who considered themselves virtuous because they confined themselves to women.” Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), 38.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 40.

of certain aspects in the church, including his own monastic form of existence. Deeper theological foundation for this criticism was of course still lacking.<sup>9</sup>

What is most noteworthy in this period is the lack of a Reformation theology, especially the doctrine of justification by faith.<sup>10</sup>

### **Textual Analysis**

Luther began his sermon with a classification of three types of human goods; (1) external goods, including things like money and possessions, (2) physical/personal goods, such as health, beauty, and reputation, and (3) spiritual/internal goods like wisdom, faith, and love.<sup>11</sup> Individuals use each of these goods either to harm or help their neighbors. Therefore, Scripture compels the people of God to “depart from evil” regarding the former option and “do good” in respect to the latter.<sup>12</sup>

Luther continued by explaining that merely refraining from harming one’s neighbor “is not sufficient for salvation.”<sup>13</sup> The Christian must also help his neighbor. Matthew 7:12 urges Christians, not merely to refrain from doing harm. The Christian must also do unto others as he would have done unto him. Luther offered three proofs for this interpretation. First, reason alone demonstrates the insufficiency of mere neutrality towards good works. Second, the authority of Scripture demonstrates the necessity of positive good works. Third, analogy demonstrates the essential nature of doing good works for one’s neighbor, not merely refraining from bad. He lamented, “From these our morals, one observes that there is almost no Christian life among us.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology : Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 50.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>This classification first appeared in Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics*, I, 7. Luther lectured on this work in 1508 in Wittenberg.

<sup>12</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 7.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 12.

Luther concluded his sermon by answering three objections. First, some might suggest that mere empathy for the hurting is enough. He reminded his hearers that Jesus said, “Whatever you wish that others would *do* to you, *do* also to them.” The command is not a call to empathy, but to action. Second, some object saying it is sufficient to leave the hurting in peace, provided they do no evil unto them. Luther believed such a response failed the test of Scripture. Which of his hearers would honestly crave similar treatment in their distress? Third, some object claiming that their goods are their own, denying responsibility to share. Luther reminded his hearers that everything the Christian has belongs to God.

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

A careful analysis of Luther’s *inventio* of law and gospel reveals two noteworthy elements. First, although his notion of law and gospel is immature at best, the law appears in all three uses. The third use is predominant, employed at least 18 times in the sermon. The second use appeared 9 times, and the first use 5 times.<sup>15</sup> The second noteworthy element is the complete absence of the gospel. This omission is remarkable, though not surprising given Luther’s theological development circa 1512.

In this sermon, Luther’s hearers experienced the weight of law untethered from the gospel. For example, the law in its second use penultimately functions to reveal man’s wickedness *en route* to its ultimate purpose, to drive the sinner to Christ. However, in this sermon the penultimate becomes ultimate, leaving the sinner exposed with nowhere to turn.

There is little to note regarding Luther’s *dispositio* of law and gospel, since no evidence of the dialectic is traceable in this sermon. What remains is a somewhat forceful preaching of the law, perhaps resulting from Luther’s personal *Anfechtung*. Nevertheless,

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<sup>15</sup>See appendix 1 for a detailed list of the *Usus Legis* in all the sermons analyzed herein.

as later sermons demonstrate, a fierce handling of the law is not restricted to the young Luther. The difference here is that his law is untethered from the gospel.

Table 1. Law and gospel in Matthew 7:12

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	--	5	2	1
Sanctification	--	--	7	17
<i>Total</i>	--	5	9	18

Table 1 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>16</sup> Each usage of law is presented in reference to one of the twofold promises of the gospel. When the first use of the law threatens hell or damnation, it is in reference to the gospel promise of justification. When it threatens peace, security, comfort, or some other grace of God it appears in reference to the gospel promise of sanctification. When the second use accuses the hearer of unbelief, it is in reference to the gospel promise of justification. When it accuses the hearer of indwelling sin, it is in reference to the gospel promise of sanctification. When the third use commands the sinner to repent and believe, it appears in reference to the gospel promise of justification. When it commands the hearer to live in obedience, it appears in reference to the gospel promise of sanctification. Figure 1 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

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<sup>16</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

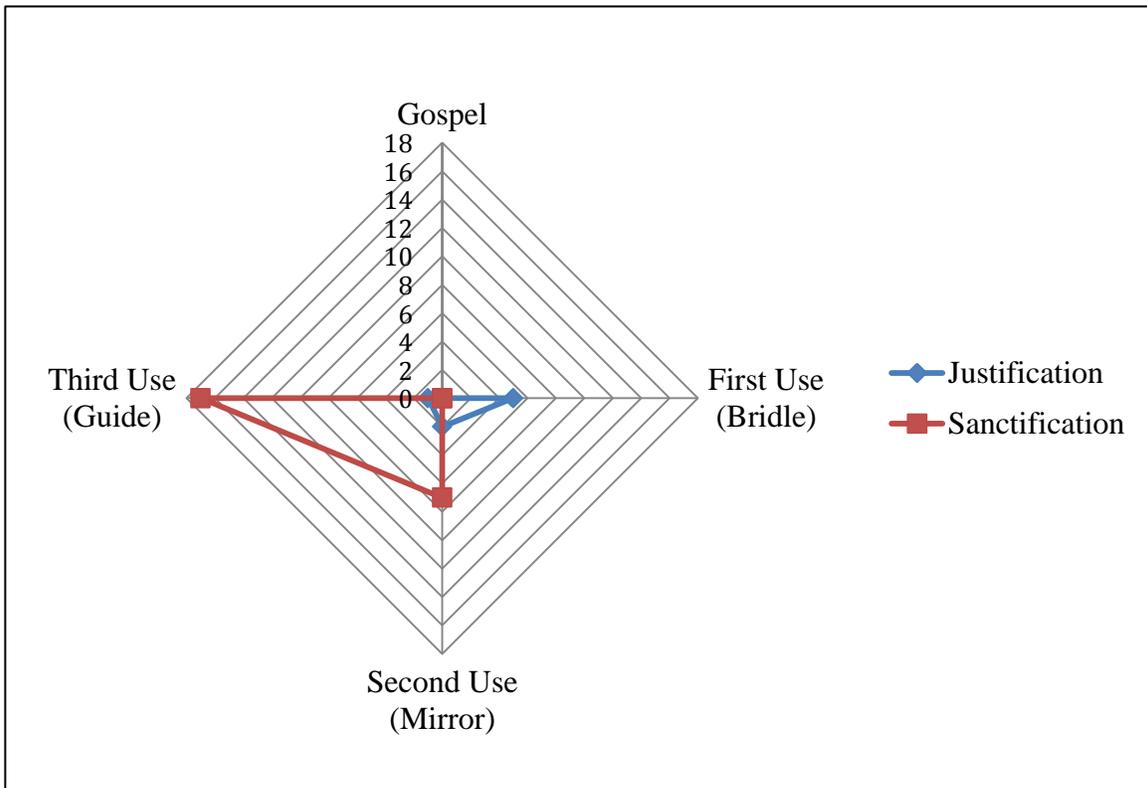


Figure 1. Law and gospel in Matthew 7:12

### Redemptive-Historical Analysis

This sermon is a classic example of a “Be Good” message. It is replete with a host of unqualified imperatives: “It is not enough to ‘depart from evil’; one must also ‘do good.’”<sup>17</sup> “We are required to do to our neighbor what we are able to do.”<sup>18</sup> “It is necessary to do good and not only refrain from doing evil.”<sup>19</sup> “We are bound to excuse, defend, console, and teach our neighbor.”<sup>20</sup> “It is . . . not enough to be innocent of harming one’s neighbor; we must also do good as far as we are able.”<sup>21</sup> “We are held

<sup>17</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 8.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

under God's command to do this as far as we are able to others also when they are in need."<sup>22</sup>

These prescriptive statements were not constrained or compelled by any semblance of the gospel. Luther did not recount the promises of God to qualify his clarion call to obedient mercy. This should come as little surprise, since Luther's personal discovery of justification by faith would not come for several more years. As a result, statements like the following are commonplace,

This saying [Matthew 7:12] should be a mirror for every man and in it he should view all his works, whether he does to his neighbor as he would wish to have others do to him, and also whether for himself he would wish to have omitted what he omits to do to his neighbor. If he finds that this is so, he may hope that he will be saved. But if not, I beseech and admonish him to amend his ways that he may not perish.<sup>23</sup>

Despite these remarks, it is noteworthy that early signs of his ethical passion for love of neighbor are so prominent in this sermon. Kiessling aptly argues that this sermon "furnishes good proof for the statement that Luther rebuilt the foundations of the morality of his time."<sup>24</sup> What is noticeably absent is the realization that love of neighbor flows from and is fueled by genuine love for God. Luther filled that void with a theology that essentially amounted to justification by love for neighbor. Nevertheless, his clarity on the importance of love for neighbor did not diminish over time; it eventually became a response to salvation, not a means of attaining it. While it would be wrong to imply that this sermon is reflective of Luther's mature preaching, it is useful in understanding his progression.

### **Psalm 19:1**

Luther's sermon on Psalm 19:1 is included to represent his treatment of

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<sup>22</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 9–10.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>24</sup>Kiessling, *Early Sermons*, 68.

*Wisdom* literature.<sup>25</sup> It also represents the only sermon from the writings of David. Furthermore, it is the only exposition included from 1516. The sermon is based on David's words: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Ps 19:1).

### **Contextual Analysis**

By December 21, 1516, Luther had been in the monastery for over a decade. The spiritual torment he endured under the weight of Roman Catholic dogma had not yet subsided, despite his consistent religious efforts to ease the burden. His visit to Rome created more questions than answers. He poured himself into his doctoral studies with little relief. Nevertheless, during his lectures on the Psalms (1513-1515) the darkness began to lift. As James Preus notes, it is here where a significant “hermeneutical shift” is first traceable in Luther’s thought.<sup>26</sup> A full year had passed from those lectures; the Doctor had since lectured on Romans and was in the midst of a series of lectures on Galatians. When he preached this sermon from Psalm 19:1, he had not yet posted his *Ninety-Five Theses*, but his relationship with Rome was beginning to splinter.<sup>27</sup> Criticism of monasticism, ecclesiastical greed and immorality were frequent in Luther’s writings and lectures.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 17–23. Also, *WA*, 1: 111-15.

<sup>26</sup>James Samuel Preus, *From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1969); cf. James S. Preus, “Old Testament Promissio in Luther’s New Hermeneutic,” *Harvard Theological Review* 60 (1967): 145–61.

<sup>27</sup>“Even as early as 1516 [Luther’s] thinking was headed toward the Reformation’s great principle of *sola fide*, or justification by faith alone. And with this understanding, Luther was headed in a direction far from Rome.” Stephen J. Nichols, *Martin Luther: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 33.

<sup>28</sup>Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 82–84.

As Luther's criticism of Rome matured, so did his preaching. Martin Brecht notes that here the uniqueness of Luther's preaching is beginning to surface:

For the most part, Luther considered the usual sermons moralistic. The teaching of faith and inner righteousness is scorned. No one wants to appear as a sinner; there is no desire to confess. Everyone fears punishment more than guilt. We recognize in these polemics how Luther's severe proclamation of humility was different from the current preaching.<sup>29</sup>

This new "proclamation of humility" runs parallel to the development of Luther's *theologia crucis*, which is beginning to emerge in his thinking. As Doberstein states, "This sermon contains one of the first detailed expositions of what Luther later called the "theology of the cross."<sup>30</sup>

### **Textual Analysis**

Luther began by making an exegetical beeline to the gospel. He reasoned, "The gospel is nothing else but the proclamation of the works of God, for it preaches what God does, and this in itself preaches his glory, since God is glorified through the very telling of the works of God."<sup>31</sup> Luther dislocated the concept of glory from the Psalm, explained how the gospel is the ultimate proclamation of God's glory, and then began to highlight that gospel.

The true work of God, he said, is "nothing else but to create righteousness, peace, mercy, truth, patience, kindness, joy, and health, inasmuch as the righteous, truthful, peaceful, kind, joyful, healthy, patient, merciful cannot do otherwise than act accordingly to his nature."<sup>32</sup> In other words, God's true handiwork is the Christians made righteous by his power and grace.

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<sup>29</sup>Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 152.

<sup>30</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 17.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

The righteousness-creating power of the gospel is an aspect of God's "proper work." God also performs an "alien work" through the gospel, to reveal the sinfulness of man. Luther instructed, "Since [God] can only make just those who are not just, he is compelled to perform an alien work in order to make them sinners, before he performs his proper work of justification."<sup>33</sup> Not that God actually causes people to sin, but He reveals the sinfulness of man to him. Through His alien work God helps man to see himself as he truly is.

Luther noticed similar parallels between the twofold work of God and the twofold work of the gospel. He clarified,

The proper office of the gospel is to proclaim the proper work of God, i.e. grace through which the Father of mercies freely gives to all men peace, righteousness and truth, mitigating all his wrath. . . . But the strange work of the gospel is . . . to make manifest sins and pronounce guilty those who were righteous in their own eyes by declaring that all men are sinners and devoid of the grace by God.<sup>34</sup>

Luther referred to this "strange work of the gospel" as *Cacangelium*—bad news. Before the sinner can receive the good news of the proper office of the gospel, he must accept the bad news of its alien office.<sup>35</sup>

Luther concluded by reminding his hearers of the futility of keeping the letter of the law. Even external obedience fails at the level of the heart. Therefore, "the gospel magnifies sin in that it so broadens the law that no man can be found just, that there is none who does not transgress the law."<sup>36</sup>

Even though the alien work of the gospel appears as "bad news," it ultimately achieves the highest good. Luther said, "Therefore the law is an excellent thing, in so far

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<sup>33</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 19.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>35</sup>Luther declared, "So the gospel sounds exceedingly harsh in its alien tones, and yet this must be done, in order that it may be able to sound with its own proper tones." *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

as it points out sins and makes us realize our own misfortune, and thus moves us to seek the good. For the first step to health is to admit that one is sick, and the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord."<sup>37</sup>

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

This sermon represents the first example where Luther explained and articulated the gospel. For the first time he clearly expressed the essentiality of justification by faith and the insufficiency of obedient works to secure salvation. Despite this increased clarity, the law remains prominent in this sermon. He employed the second use of the law 12 times and the third use 2 times. The promises of the gospel were highlighted 7 times, 5 times in relation to the promise of justification, and 2 times in relation to sanctification.

Furthermore, for the first time Luther's *dispositio* of law and gospel is visible. It is important to note Luther's law-gospel skeleton is intact, even though the outward terminology is not fully developed. Luther's conception of the "twofold work of the gospel" would soon yield to his law-gospel dialectic. The alien work of the gospel (i.e. revealing and condemning sinners) is indicative of his mature view of the law. The proper work of the gospel (i.e. God's provision of grace) is indicative of his mature view of the gospel. Therefore, this is undoubtedly a sermon about law and gospel, even though the terminology lacked the precise vocabulary of his mature thought.

The order Luther employed in his arrangement of law and gospel is significant.<sup>38</sup> Luther wasted no time discussing the gospel in this sermon. He began

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<sup>37</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 22–23.

<sup>38</sup>Since the young Luther had not fully developed his law-gospel dialectic, he did not label everything representative of law and gospel as such. In this sermon, Luther refers to law and gospel as "alien gospel" and "proper gospel." He also refers to law as "law" and "gospel" at various points. To navigate the confusion, one must remember how Luther defines law and gospel. As stated above, "The law is any word of God that kills or commands and the gospel is any word of God that makes alive or provides."

declaring that the gospel proclaims "the works of God, for it preaches what God does."<sup>39</sup> He then preached the law, reminding his hearers, "The gospel . . . discloses the idleness and sin of men."<sup>40</sup> Luther again preached the gospel by explicating God's power to create righteousness, then the law by reminding listeners that God cannot make people just unless they first recognize themselves to be unjust. Luther maintained this dialectical back-and-forth throughout the remainder of the sermon, beginning with gospel followed by the law.

One exception to Luther's gospel-then-law pattern is worthy of examination. The only time he broke this pattern was in the sermon's conclusion. He assured his congregation that the law is "an excellent thing" because it drives people to the gospel.<sup>41</sup> He then concluded by reminding them that the grace of the gospel "infuses love, by which [the Christian] is made more confident, because, while he sees that he wants to keep the commandments and yet is not able to keep them at all, the fulness of Christ is accepted instead, until he too is finally made perfect."<sup>42</sup> In other words, despite a steady pattern of gospel then law, Luther concluded with an arrangement of law followed by gospel.

Table 2 below quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>43</sup> Noteworthy here is the inclusion of gospel promises, especially in regards to the promise of justification. Figure 2 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

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<sup>39</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 18.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

Table 2. Law and gospel in Psalm 19:1

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	5	--	12	2
Sanctification	2	--	--	--
<i>Total</i>	7	--	12	2

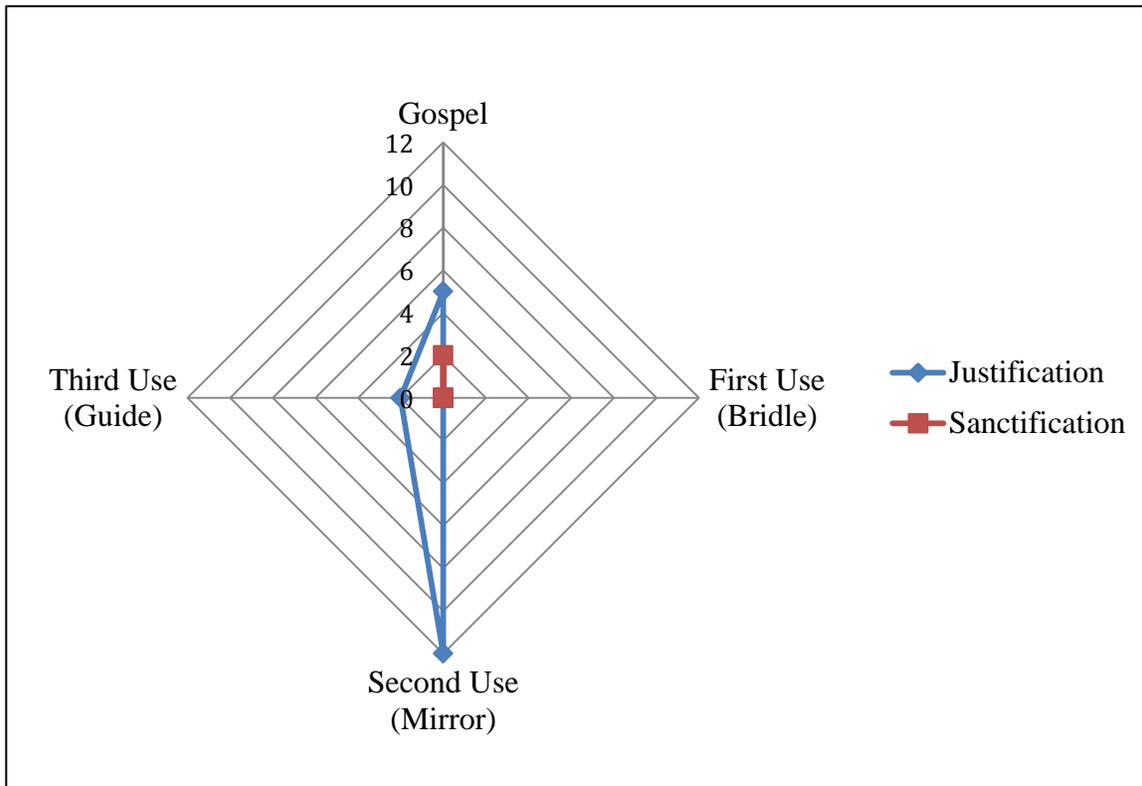


Figure 2. Law and gospel in Psalm 19:1

### Redemptive-Historical Analysis

Although the redemptive-historical preacher (and others) would likely find fault with Luther's exegesis, little else in this sermon would concern him. There are no signs of exemplaristic preaching in this sermon. Indeed, the only time Luther mentioned an example of external obedience, he reminded his hearers that even those who seemed

outwardly compliant retained wickedness in their hearts. Similarly, Luther avoided imperatives in this sermon, apart from commands to repent and believe the gospel. He did not urge his audience to be good, nor did he urge them to be disciplined. The heart of his sermon is truly a call for his hearers to believe the gospel.

### **Matthew 11:25-30**

Luther's 1517 sermon on Matthew 11:25-30 is included to help demonstrate the reformer's homiletical progression.<sup>44</sup> This is the first of three sermons herein that are based on this text. Furthermore, it is the only sermon included from 1517. The sermon is based on Jesus' words in Matthew's Gospel:

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:25-30).

### **Contextual Analysis**

On February 24, 1517, Luther preached a passionate sermon on Matthew 11:25-30. Just one month earlier, on January 22, the Leipzig Dominican John Tetzel became the chief vendor for the sale of indulgences in nearby Magdeburg.<sup>45</sup> Roland Bainton recounts Tetzel's indulgence preaching:

Listen to the voices of your dear dead relatives and friends, beseeching you and saying, "Pity us, pity us. We are in dire torment from which you can redeem us for a pittance." Do you not wish to? Open your ears. Hear the father saying to his son, the mother to her daughter, "We bore you, nourished you, brought you up, left you our fortunes, and you are so cruel and hard that now you are not willing for so little to set us free. Will you let us lie here in flames? Will you delay our promised glory?"

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<sup>44</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 26–31. Also, *WA*, 1: 138-142.

<sup>45</sup>Brecht, *Luther: 1483-1521*, 182.

Remember that you are able to release them, for  
As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,  
The soul from purgatory springs.<sup>46</sup>

Due to the prohibition of Frederick the Wise, Tetzel could not sell indulgences in electoral Saxony. Nevertheless, Luther's penitents were often able to make their purchases by traveling as little as twenty-one miles across the border.<sup>47</sup>

Luther's concerns with the sale of indulgences are visible in this sermon. Kiessling rightly notes that the indulgence controversy appears "briefly but intensely."<sup>48</sup> This is probably indicative of Luther's initial tactic to "set things right through sermons."<sup>49</sup> Although his complete rejection of the practice has not yet come, this sermon represents a further splintering of Luther's relationship with Rome and another step in the maturation of his theology. Furthermore, the hearer-sensitivity of Luther's homiletic is on full display.

### **Textual Analysis**

Luther began by asking two questions of the text. First, who are the wise and understanding? Luther believed the "wise" in this text are not necessarily those who incorrectly believe themselves to be wise, but those who lack a hunger for true wisdom. In other words, the "wise" from whom the gospel is hidden are the spiritually proud and content. Luther stated, "whether they be those who only think they are wise, like dolts and complete ignoramuses, or whether they possess wisdom, like subtle hypocrites, are wise only because they are not fools, not empty, not hungry for wisdom, and not babes [before God]."<sup>50</sup> The defining characteristic of this worldly wisdom is pride.

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<sup>46</sup>Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 59–60.

<sup>47</sup>Brecht, *Luther: 1483-1521*, 183.

<sup>48</sup>Kiessling, *Early Sermons*, 100.

<sup>49</sup>Brecht, *Luther: 1483-1521*, 184.

<sup>50</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 27.

Second, what has the Father hidden from those who appear to be wise? Luther answered, "What is hidden is Christ himself and God the Father."<sup>51</sup> Only they whom the world calls fools know Christ and the Father, since this knowledge is not attained but revealed. It is foolish for the seemingly wise to exert themselves to achieve or attain this gospel, since it can only be received through revelation. Likewise, it is foolish to receive this gospel and then resort to laziness. Christians do not work in an ill-fated effort to decrease their heavy yokes. Such folly does not reduce one's labor but increases it. Christians work because Christ has lifted their burdens.

Luther concluded his sermon by addressing an immediate concern, the abuse of indulgences. The indulgence system did not give weary disciples rest, but added a burdensome yoke. Ironically, this heavy burden of indulgences did not lead to holiness, but greater licentiousness because indulgences did not teach people to hate sin, but merely its penalty.

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

This sermon features a robust *inventio* of both law and gospel. Luther repeatedly reminded his hearers that true righteousness is "not in us, but in Christ."<sup>52</sup> The Christian's righteousness is an alien righteousness, "It is outside of us, in God."<sup>53</sup> This mystery happens when "the Father in his mercy reckons to us his Son's righteousness."<sup>54</sup> Luther's exposition of the yoke-sharing promises of Christ is rich with gospel implications and promises.

The beauty of this gospel is clearly visible against the backdrop of a clear

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<sup>51</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 28.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 29.

application of the law in the text. He employed the law as a bridle once, reminding his hearers of the threat of punishment for those who do not hate their sins.<sup>55</sup> He utilized the law as a mirror 11 times, accusing his hearers of worldly wisdom,<sup>56</sup> vainly striving to earn righteousness,<sup>57</sup> failing to hate their sin,<sup>58</sup> and promoting licentiousness and a false sense of security by foolishly trusting in indulgences.<sup>59</sup> He employed the law as a guide 9 times, urging his hearers to "Get out of yourselves and come to [Christ]"<sup>60</sup> and "despair of yourselves and hope in [him]."<sup>61</sup>

Luther's *dispositio* of law-gospel followed an unpredictable pattern. He began with the law in its first use, revealing worldly wisdom as sinful foolishness. He then employed the law in its third use to encourage hearers to embrace true humility. He again held up the mirror of the law to expose worldly wisdom, before using gospel promises to declare where true wisdom is found. What followed was a smattering of law and gospel in no clearly recognizable pattern. The sermon concluded with an inordinate emphasis of law as Luther bemoaned the popularity of indulgences. This sinful practice did nothing to appease the wrath of God, but only promoted licentiousness and a false sense of security. Luther closed with a telling lament: "Oh, you snoring priests! Oh, darkness deeper than Egyptian! How secure we are in the midst of the worst of all our evils!"<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 30.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 29. Cf. *ibid.*, 30.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 29. Cf. *ibid.*, 27.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

Table 3 below quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>63</sup>

Noteworthy here is the preponderance of material centered on the doctrine of justification. Figure 3 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

Table 3. Law and gospel in Matthew 11:25-30 (1517)

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	7	1	9	6
Sanctification	1	--	2	3
<i>Total</i>	8	1	11	9

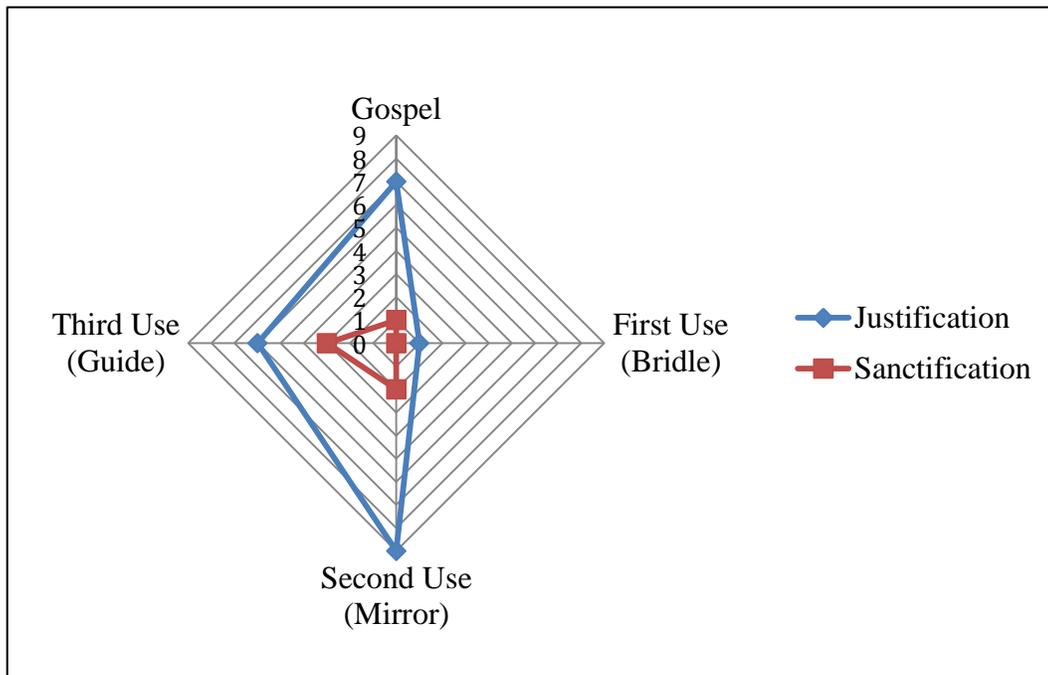


Figure 3. Law and gospel in Matthew 11:25-30 (1517)

<sup>63</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

## Redemptive-Historical Analysis

Most modern preachers would likely recognize this sermon as a Christ-centered treatment of a beautiful passage. However, this sermon features two nonredemptive elements. First, Luther was guilty of prescriptive preaching. He issued stark imperatives without the recommended gospel caveats. For example, he commanded his hearers to carry their crosses: "[Christ] does not say: Do this or that; but rather, come to me, get away from yourselves, and carry your cross after me."<sup>64</sup> Luther viewed this as the supreme imperative, but he did not qualify this imperative. He did not remind his hearers that they could not possibly carry their crosses apart from grace, or that Christ bore a cross for them. It is not that Luther denied these gospel truths; he simply found it unnecessary to issue these qualifications after every imperative.

Second, Luther was guilty of exemplaristic preaching. He encouraged his audience to follow Christ as Abram followed Yahweh: "Get out of yourselves and come to me. Despair of yourselves and hope in me, just as Abraham went out from his country, his kindred, from his and his father's house."<sup>65</sup> Luther made no effort to sully the patriarch's reputation, or to remind his hearers that the grace of God empowered his obedient faith. Therefore, despite the Christ-saturated tone of this sermon, upon further review Luther fell squarely outside the bounds of redemptive-historical legitimacy.

### Exodus 25:9-27:18

Luther's sermon from Exodus 25:9-27:18 is included to represent his treatment of the *Law* genre.<sup>66</sup> It also represents one of only two sermons from the writings of

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<sup>64</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 30.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>66</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, *The Christian in Society I*, ed. James Atkinson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 235–42. Also *WA*, 7: (792) 795-802.

Moses. Furthermore, it is the only sermon included from 1521. His sermon is based on God's instructions to Moses regarding the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings.

### **Contextual Analysis**

Much had transpired between the February 1517 sermon on Matthew 11 and this sermon based on the tabernacle in Exodus 25-27. Although the exact date of this sermon is unknown, most scholars agree on a date in early 1521, probably before Luther's appearance at the Diet of Worms on April 17.<sup>67</sup> On October 31, 1517, Luther posted his earth-shattering *Ninety-Five Theses* on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. That document set off a firestorm in Germany, ultimately resulting in a summons to appear before the Emperor at the Diet of Worms.

Luther's theological development during this period can hardly be overstated. His "Reformation Discovery" of justification by faith alone is complete.<sup>68</sup> His disputes with Cajetan and Eck settled his convictions regarding the authority of Scripture over the papacy.<sup>69</sup> His 1520 *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* solidified his rejection of papal sacramentalism.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, even as Luther grew more confident in his newfound Reformation theology, his parishioners often lagged behind. Much teaching was necessary to strengthen the faith of the Wittenberg elect. This dire need was likely the impetus for this sermon, as Timothy Lull explains:

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<sup>67</sup>Luther, *LW*, 44, 233.

<sup>68</sup>Two main schools of thought exist: Some contend that Luther's breakthrough regarding justification by faith came between the autumn of 1514 and spring 1515. Others maintain the discovery occurred in 1518. Either way, by early 1521 Luther's discovery is complete. Cf. Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 85–95.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 110–26.

<sup>70</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 36, *Word and Sacrament II*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and Abdel R. Wentz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 3–126.

In this sermon Luther addresses people confused by the proclamation of justification by faith alone. They found it difficult to disengage from the theologies of good works with which they were familiar—and the accompanying ceremonies, fast days, holy days, and so on, that followed from them. Luther’s pastoral instincts made him sensitive to such consciences.<sup>71</sup>

### Textual Analysis

*A Sermon on the Three Kinds of Good Life for the Instruction of Consciences* is a quasi-allegorical treatment of Christian morality based on the description of the tabernacle in Exodus 25:9-27:18.<sup>72</sup> Just as the tabernacle was divided into three parts—the holy of holies, the holy place, and the courtyard—there are “three kinds of preaching or teaching which make for three kinds of conscience and three kinds of sin, as well as three kinds of the good life with three kinds of good works.”<sup>73</sup> Luther’s aim was not to present these three kinds of righteousness as equal options, but to distinguish between the three and present one as true righteousness.

The first kind of good works is much like the atrium of the tabernacle. “It is preaching or teaching which is concerned only with outward works which are bound up

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<sup>71</sup>Martin Luther, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. William R. Russell and Timothy F. Lull, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 132.

<sup>72</sup>Some might fear that the allegorical features of this sermon could undercut its usefulness as a corrective. Nevertheless, its inclusion is warranted here for at least three reasons. First, it helpfully demonstrates Luther’s homiletical evolution. Although he never fully escaped occasional allegorical interpretation, his later preaching represents a significant departure from allegorization on the scale represented in this sermon. Second, this sermon’s inclusion is warranted for its helpful demonstration of Luther’s law-gospel paradigm. It is not Luther’s entire homiletic that is put forth as a corrective to potential imbalances within RHP, but his law-gospel paradigm. Therefore, since that paradigm is helpfully treated here, its inclusion is justifiable. Finally, this sermon’s inclusion is warranted because Luther’s role as potential corrective is not limited to a single sermon, but his preaching ministry as a whole. In other words, including a sermon that departs from a more grammatical-historical exposition does not jeopardize the claims herein, especially since this sermon aptly depicts the homiletical missteps that occasionally plagued Luther’s earliest preaching.

<sup>73</sup>Luther, *LW*, 44: 235.

with time and place.”<sup>74</sup> These include religious traditions, outward vestments, Lenten fasts, and other papal decrees. Lamentably, many had traded true righteousness for *Atrium* righteousness. These *Atrienses Sancti*—churchyard saints—felt far greater pangs of conscience for eating on the eve of a fast than more serious transgressions like drunkenness or adultery.<sup>75</sup>

The second kind of good works is much like the holy place, or the *Sanctum*. “This means teaching, works, and concepts of conscience which are really good. These are humility, meekness, gentleness, peace, fidelity, love, propriety, purity, and the like.”<sup>76</sup> It is this *Sanctum* righteousness that truly places a traveler on the road to heaven, “apart from what he does or leaves undone in the atrium.”<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, Christians must take care in the pursuit of this righteousness. They must fight for it their entire lives. They must do it gladly, not out of constraint. They must do it for righteousness’ sake, not to earn God’s love or escape His wrath.

When the Christian pursues righteousness in this way, he has performed the third kind of good works and has entered the *Sanctum sanctorum*. This righteousness rightly focuses on the heart, pursued for the right reasons and empowered with the right strength. The Holy Spirit energizes the Christian to attain this type of righteousness, achievable only by faith.

Nevertheless, the primacy of faith does not render good works as unnecessary. Faith and good works are inseparable. Luther concluded,

Faith alone saves. Why? Faith brings with it the Spirit, and he performs every good work with joy and love. In this way the Spirit fulfils God’s commandments, and brings a man his salvation, all of which is signified by the sanctuary and the nave

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<sup>74</sup>Luther, *LW*, 44: 235.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*

(the *Sanctum* and the *Sanctum sanctorum*) being built in one and the same structure. But the atrium, the churchyard that lies apart, is to show that good works without faith cannot happen and that faith without works cannot endure.<sup>78</sup>

### Rhetorical Analysis

This sermon is primarily a presentation of the law in its second use. The bulk of the sermon’s material focused on the errors of courtyard righteousness. Luther exposed the folly and hypocrisy of external righteousness, using these legal indicatives as a bridge to prepare his hearers for the great indicative of the gospel. The law in this sense appeared 13 times in this sermon. Conversely, Luther omitted the first use and employed the third use 6 times.

Interestingly, Luther did not issue gospel indicatives until his explanation of *Sanctum sanctorum* righteousness. Conversely, his explanation of *Atrium* righteousness predominately featured the law in its second use and his explanation of *Sanctum* righteousness focused on the law in its third use. Luther issued legal indicatives to expose the folly of *Atrium* righteousness, legal imperatives to exhort his hearers toward *Sanctum* righteousness, and gospel indicatives to encourage his hearers in their pursuit of *Sanctum sanctorum* righteousness.

Table 4. Law and gospel in Exodus 25:9-27:18

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	3	--	9	--
Sanctification	3	--	4	6
<i>Total</i>	<i>6</i>	--	<i>13</i>	<i>6</i>

Table 4 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>79</sup> The

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<sup>78</sup>Luther, *LW*, 44: 242.

<sup>79</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see

emphasis on the second use of the law is particularly noteworthy here. Figure 4 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon. Again, Luther’s use of the law is weighted towards the third use and the pursuit of sanctification.

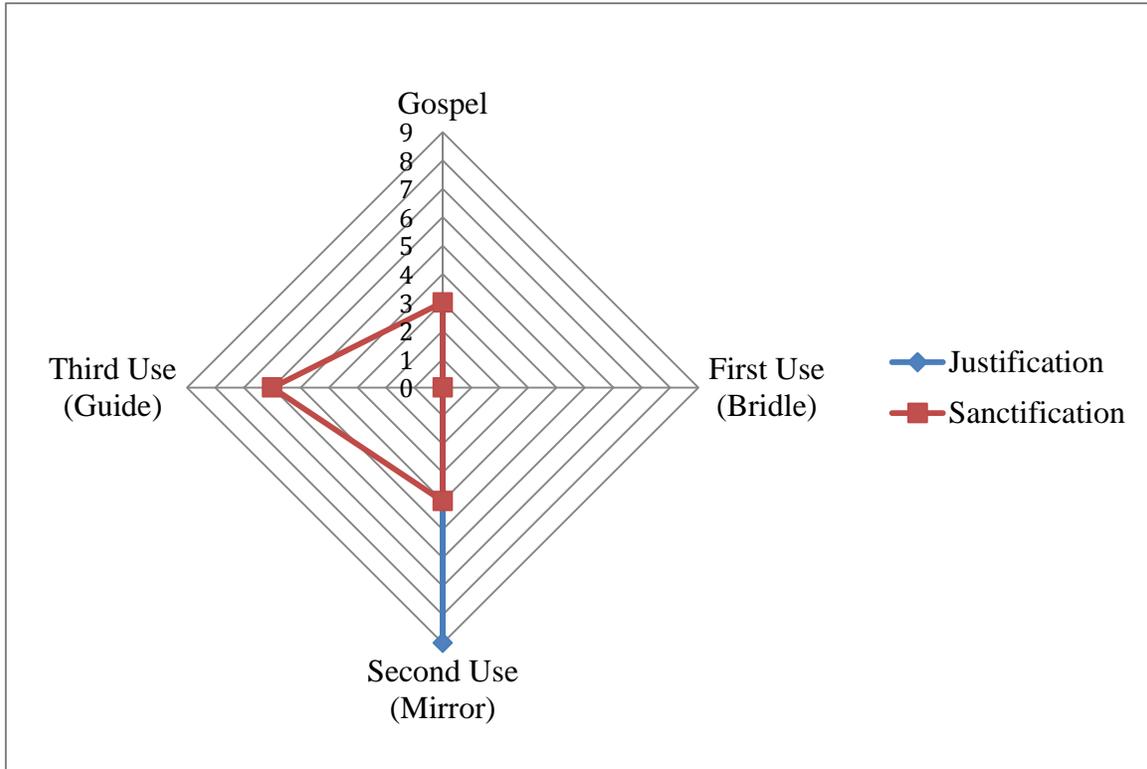


Figure 4. Law and gospel in Exodus 25:9-27:18

### Redemptive-Historical Analysis

Apart from its allegorical features and lack of exegesis, this sermon is in many ways a valuable illustration of conformity to redemptive-historical standards. Luther began this sermon with a heavy dose of law designed to drive the righteousness-seeker to the Source of true righteousness. He exhorted his hearers to discipline themselves in the pursuit of true righteousness, but he concluded by reminding them that such

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appendix 1.

righteousness is unattainable apart from the Spirit's work of grace.

However, many of Luther's imperatives resemble the nonredemptive error of exhortative preaching. For example, "A man must fight against pride, avarice, immodesty, anger, hatred, and the like. Here must we keep ourselves fully occupied as long as we live."<sup>80</sup> Elsewhere he exhorted his congregation to labor, not just doing good works, but with the right motives.<sup>81</sup> Because of man's tendency to pursue righteousness either to earn love or escape wrath, the Christian must discipline himself "to go down on his knees for grace and deny himself."<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, Luther did qualify these exhortations with the reality of the gospel: "Christ referred to this when he said in Mark, 'He that believes shall be saved.' Faith alone saves. Why? Faith brings with it the Spirit, and he performs every good work with joy and love. In this way the Spirit fulfils God's commandments, and brings a man his salvation."<sup>83</sup> However, several questions remain from a redemptive-historical perspective. Are Luther's gospel caveats sufficiently explicit? Are they in close enough proximity to their legal antecedents? How soon after an imperatival remark is a Christ-centered preacher obligated to issue a gospel qualification? Answers are not readily clear, but a further investigation of Luther's preaching may reveal much.

### Summary

The sermons of the early Luther reveal two important truths. First, they show a real concern for the behavior of his hearers. Kiessling writes, "Another striking characteristic is their tone of high ethical seriousness. The preacher is full of impatience

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<sup>80</sup>Luther, *LW*, 44: 240.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 242.

with things as they are.”<sup>84</sup> In his first two sermons, Luther advocated a form of justification by works. Nevertheless, after his discovery of *sola fide*, he maintained a passionate stance on the importance of good works for the Christian.

Second, Luther’s early sermons reveal a professor of Bible undergoing the most dramatic theological shifts of his career. Kiessling explains, “As regards doctrine, the young preacher . . . is standing with his left foot on old, with his right on new, territory, undecided which way to go.”<sup>85</sup> This theological instability is highly important to understanding the early Luther. His earliest sermons<sup>86</sup> reveal a lack of theological staples like *sola fide*, but they maintain Luther’s passion for Christian morality.

These insights into the early Luther offer important clarity from a redemptive-historical perspective. This analysis should not lean too heavily on Luther’s earliest homiletic, due to its pre-Reformation status. Nevertheless, the above observations should not be dismissed, but considered in light of Luther’s entire preaching ministry. Moreover, the sermons from this epoch are far too important to ignore. As Kiessling explains, “Quite fascinating is the range of his genius, the combination in it of the simple and child-like with the heroic, of brusque and earthly straightforwardness with fine religious sensitivity, of mystical depth with ethical practicality.”<sup>87</sup>

Table 5 below quantifies the uses of the law in Luther's early sermons. He employed the law as bridle an average of 1.5 times per sermon, as mirror 11.25 times per sermon, and as guide 8.75 times per sermon. Furthermore, he issued gospel promises an average of 5.25 times per sermon. These numbers are relatively consistent with a more extensive analysis reported in Appendix Two. Figure 5 below depicts the uses of the law

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<sup>84</sup>Kiessling, *Early Sermons*, 77.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Specifically in mind here are the sermons on Matt 7:12 and Ps 19:1.

<sup>87</sup>Kiessling, *Early Sermons*, 146.

graphically as a percentage of the whole. When he employed the law in these sermons, 52 percent of those instances featured the second use, 41 percent featured the third use, and 7 percent featured the law in its first use. Figure 6 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in Luther’s early years. Particularly noteworthy is how Luther employed the second use primarily to reveal the sinner’s need for justification, and the third use primarily to issue commands relating to the believer’s sanctification.

Table 5. *Usus legis* from 1510-1521

<i>Year</i>	<i>Sermon</i>	<i>Gospel</i>	<i>First Use</i>	<i>Second Use</i>	<i>Third Use</i>
1510/1512	Matthew 7:12	--	5	9	18
1516	Psalms 19:1	7	--	12	2
1517	Matthew 11:25-30	8	1	11	9
1521	Exodus 25:9-27:18	6	--	13	6
<i>Total</i>		<i>21</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Average</i>		<i>5.25</i>	<i>1.50</i>	<i>11.25</i>	<i>8.75</i>

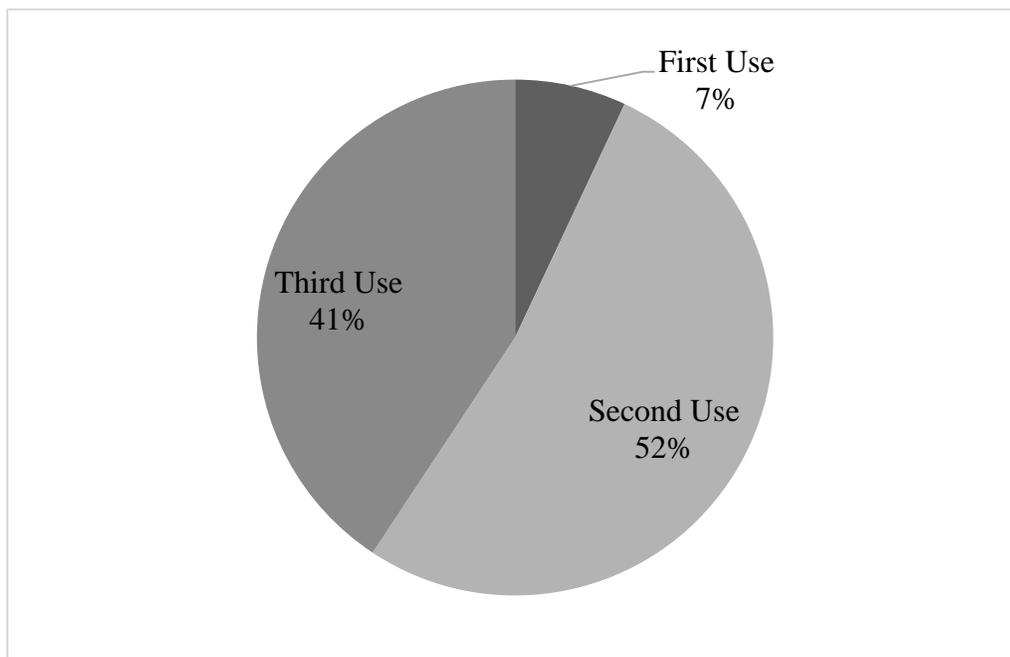


Figure 5. *Usus legis* from 1510-1521

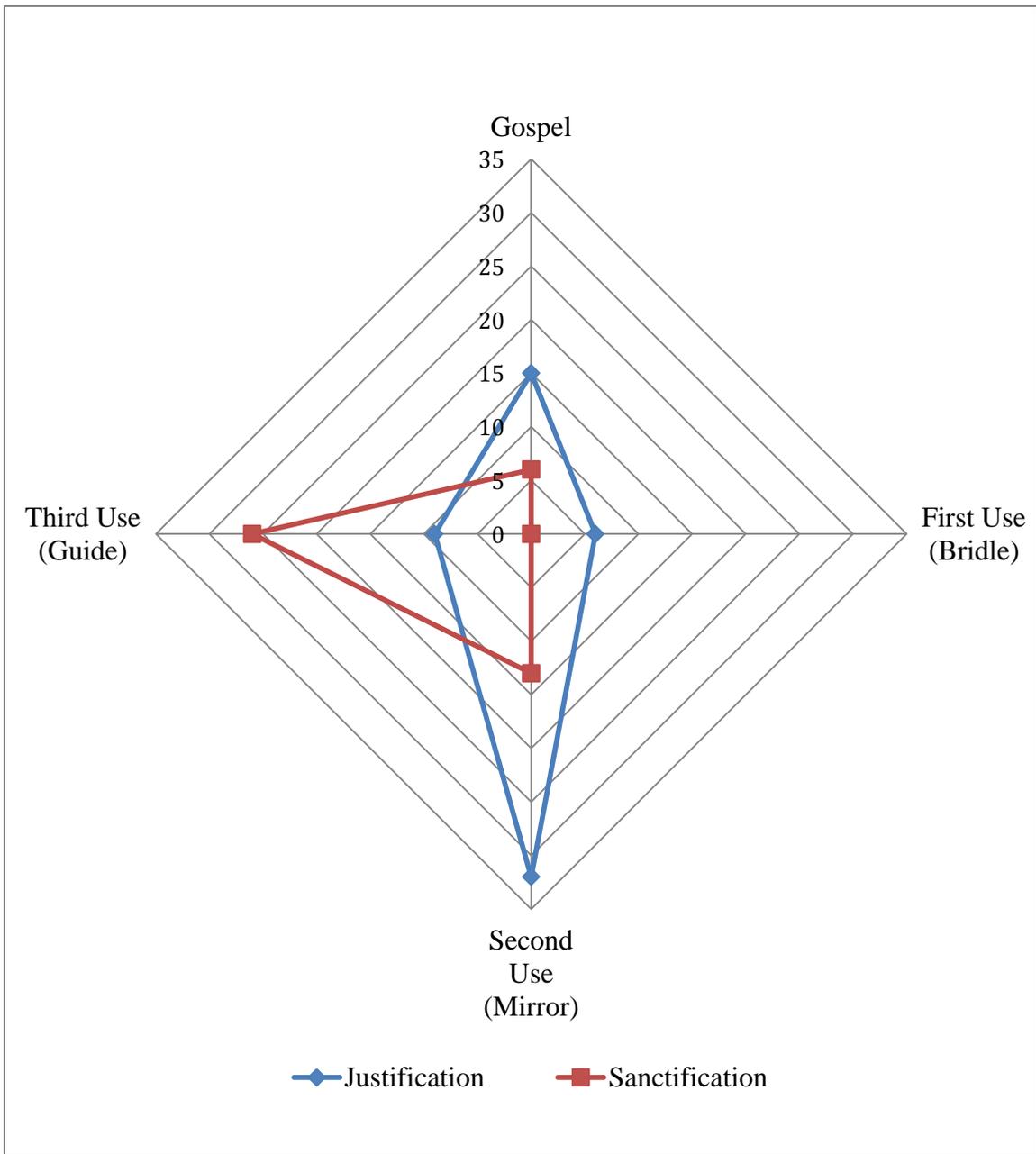


Figure 6. Law and gospel from 1510-1521

## CHAPTER 6

### LUTHER'S PREACHING IN MID-CAREER: 1522-1532

The previous chapter considered a handful of Luther's earliest sermons. Luther's use of the law in his early years focused primarily on the second use. In addition, Luther's explication of gospel promises was limited in his early preaching. Similar results were gleaned from an analysis of six additional sermons from this epoch.<sup>1</sup> On average, Luther utilized the first use 0.83 times per sermon, the second use 10.67 times, the third use 9.5 times, and the gospel 8 times. Luther's preaching in mid-career reveals a noticeable shift towards a greater implementation of the law in its third use.

To uncover this shift, Luther's preaching in mid-career is examined. First, this chapter explores his *Invocavit Sermons*, a series of eight short sermons preached in Wittenberg when the very survival of the Reformation was in jeopardy. Second, it reviews two sermons on Jude's epistle preached from 1523. Third, it analyzes Luther's 1525 exposition of Matthew 11:25-30. Fourth, it investigates a sermon preached on the Ten Commandments from 1528; fifth, a topical message on the cross and suffering delivered in 1530; and finally, a funeral sermon from 1 Thessalonians preached in 1532.

#### **Invocavit Sermons**

Luther's *Invocavit Sermons* are included for their profound historical relevance.<sup>2</sup> Neil Leroux asserts, "The *Invocavit Sermons* are still the most famous of all

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<sup>1</sup>See appendix 2 for detailed analysis.

<sup>2</sup>To read these sermons in their entirety, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 69–100. Also, *WA*, 10<sup>III</sup>: 1-64.

sermons preached by Luther.”<sup>3</sup> He continues, "This Wittenberg Movement was the first serious threat to emerge from within the evangelical camp because it provoked occasional violence and strong repercussions by rulers."<sup>4</sup> This collection of eight topical sermons represents Luther’s response to his more radical counterparts. The *Invocavit Sermons* were essential to the survival of the Reformation, and their historical importance cannot be overstated. Furthermore, they are the only sermons included from 1522.

### **Contextual Analysis**

Luther left the Diet of Worms in May 1521 as a condemned heretic. Because many feared for his life, his supporters concocted a plan to protect him. The newly minted outlaw was covertly kidnapped by Frederick the Wise and hidden away in Wartburg Castle, a fortress in the Thuringian hills less than two hundred miles from the reformer's Wittenberg pastorate. For several months, he was productively writing and translating at Wartburg Castle while the reforms steadily progressed at the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

In Luther's absence, his colleague Andreas Karlstadt assumed leadership of the burgeoning movement in Wittenberg. Initially Luther supported the reforms instituted by Karlstadt. However, by the end of the year Karlstadt had moved in a decidedly radical direction. Karlstadt pushed for rapid reform, abandoning the private mass, denouncing celibacy, forcing laity to violate weak consciences by handling the sacramental cup, destroying images, and forbidding auricular confession. These concerns compelled Luther to leave Wartburg Castle earlier than planned and address the situation personally.

Luther's response to Karlstadt and the radical reforms came in the form of eight sermons, preached consecutively from March 9-16, 1522. The Reformation itself

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<sup>3</sup>Neil R. Leroux, *Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style from the Invocavit Sermons* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 13.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

seemed to be in grave danger. "Never before had Luther stood in such peril," Bainton records.<sup>5</sup> Despite great risk, Luther responded with love, eloquence, and clear-headed truth.

### **Textual Analysis**

In the first sermon, Luther explained four truths the Christian must know.<sup>6</sup> First, "We must know that we are the children of wrath, and all our works, intentions, and thoughts are nothing at all."<sup>7</sup> Second, Christians must know "that God has sent us his only-begotten Son that we may believe in him and that whoever trusts in him shall be free from sin and a child of God."<sup>8</sup> Third, "We must also have love and through love we must do to one another as God has done to us through faith."<sup>9</sup> Fourth, Christians must know patience because loving one's neighbor is not easy.

In the second sermon, Luther discussed the private mass.<sup>10</sup> He began by distinguishing between two concerns: matters of Christian orthodoxy and matters of individual conscience. Love should be the guiding principle in navigating through these prickly issues. Unfortunately, the Wittenberg reformers abandoned this love in an otherwise noble effort to abolish the private mass. Luther's response to their unseemly behavior was threefold: they should abandon their confidence in human force, bolster their confidence in the Word of God, and aim for repentance.

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<sup>5</sup>Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), 164. Martin Brecht agrees: "He believed that he himself was in extreme danger." Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup>Preached March 9, 1522. Luther, *LW*, 51: 70–75.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>Preached March 10, 1522. *Ibid.*, 75–78.

In the third sermon, Luther addressed clerical vows and images.<sup>11</sup> He began by reminding his hearers of the "musts" which are necessary. Nevertheless, there are many matters of choice that "must not be forbidden by any one."<sup>12</sup> These controversial subjects included the marrying of priests, the forsaking of vows, and the use of images in the church. Even though many may have had enlightened consciences regarding these issues, they should not reform by force. Luther reminded them of Paul's example in Athens, "He preached against their idols, but he overthrew none by force. And you rush, create an uproar, break down altars, and overthrow images! Do you really believe you can abolish altars in this way? No, you will only set them up more firmly."<sup>13</sup>

In the fourth sermon, Luther continued the discussion on images and Christian liberty.<sup>14</sup> He said, "On the subject of images, in particular, we saw that they ought to be abolished when they are worshipped; otherwise not."<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, despite the idolatrous intentions behind many images, Christians should eschew the radical response of removing images by force. Rather than removing images by force, Christians should preach against the folly of images and trust the Word of God to do its work.

Regarding Christian liberty and the eating of meat, he offered three principles to instruct the Christian. First, "if you cannot abstain from meat without harm to yourself, or if you are sick, you may eat whatever you like, and if anyone takes offense, let him be offended."<sup>16</sup> Second, "if you should be pressed [to sacrifice your Christian liberty] you must in no wise allow yourself to be drawn away from the liberty in which God has

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<sup>11</sup>Preached March 11, 1522. Luther, *LW*, 51: 79–83.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>14</sup>Preached March 12, 1522. *Ibid.*, 84–88.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 86.

placed you, but do just the contrary to spite [the pope]."<sup>17</sup> Third, when encountering weaker brothers and sisters "we must bear patiently with these people and not use our liberty; since it brings no peril or harm to body or soul; in fact, it is rather salutary, and we are doing our brothers and sisters a great service besides."<sup>18</sup>

In the fifth sermon, Luther discussed the observance of the sacrament.<sup>19</sup> He began by conceding the folly of papal laws regarding the sacrament, such as the laws against parishioners touching the cup or body of Christ. However, the radicals had replaced the papal legalism with a Protestant legalism in reverse. The Wittenberg reformers replaced the legalistic restrictions *against* handling the sacrament with a legalistic requirement *to* handle the sacrament. Only the gospel could bring about the change they desired: "No new practices should be introduced, unless the gospel has first been thoroughly preached and understood, as it has been among you."<sup>20</sup> The rash reforms in Wittenberg did not model the spirit that God required.

Luther's sixth sermon was a beautiful presentation of the gospel.<sup>21</sup> Only the gospel makes sinners worthy to receive the sacrament: "There must be faith to make the reception worthy and acceptable before God. . . . Faith (which we all must have, if we wish to go to the sacrament worthily) is a firm trust that Christ, the Son of God, stands in our place and has taken all our sins upon his shoulders and that he is the eternal satisfaction for our sin and reconciles us with God the Father."<sup>22</sup> Until the communicant believed thusly, he should refrain from taking the sacrament "for this food will not enter a

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<sup>17</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 87.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>Preached March 13, 1522. *Ibid.*, 88–91.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>21</sup>Preached March 14, 1522. *Ibid.*, 92–95.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 92.

sated and full heart, and if it comes to such a heart, it is harmful."<sup>23</sup>

In the seventh sermon, Luther highlighted the fundamental importance of love.<sup>24</sup> After discussing how to take the sacrament and who was worthy to partake, he reflected on its outcome, namely, increased love for God and neighbor. Luther lamented the loveless actions of the Wittenberg elect: "You are willing to take all of God's goods in the sacrament, but you are not willing to pour them out again in love. . . . This is a pity. You have heard many sermons about it and all my books are full of it and have this one purpose, to urge you to faith and love."<sup>25</sup>

In the final sermon, Luther addressed the practice of confession.<sup>26</sup> He delineated three types of confession, ecclesial confession, personal confession, and auricular confession. Ecclesial confession is the practice of church discipline as commanded in Matthew 18.<sup>27</sup> In personal confession "we go into a corner by ourselves and confess to God himself and pour out before him all our faults."<sup>28</sup> In auricular confession "one takes another aside and tells him what troubles one, so that one may hear from him a word of comfort."<sup>29</sup> The pope commands auricular confession, but Scripture is silent. Due to its papal support, Luther warily refrained from the confessional. Nevertheless, it was not right for the Radicals to forbid others from auricular confession. He concluded his sermon with three practical applications: no man should forbid the confessional, struggling Christians should confess and trust God's Word of absolution,

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<sup>23</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 94.

<sup>24</sup>Preached March 15, 1522. *Ibid.*, 95–96.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>26</sup>Preached March 16, 1522. *Ibid.*, 97–100.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

and mature believers should avoid the confessional and confess to God alone.

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

Perhaps nothing better demonstrates Luther's effectiveness as a preacher than the *Invocavit* Sermons. When Luther returned to Wittenberg the fate of the Reformation was uncertain. By the time he concluded his sermons, the violence had subsided and the city was at rest. Martin Brecht explains, "The *Invocavit* sermons made a deep impression. . . . Luther had spoken with unsurpassed eloquence, solemnity, and passion, outdoing himself. . . . The Wittenberg congregation, who flocked to hear him, submitted immediately to Luther's authority."<sup>30</sup> Perhaps it was more than "unsurpassed eloquence, solemnity, and passion" that made Luther's sermons so effective. To some degree, Luther's exemplary use of law and gospel was instrumental in the survival of the Wittenberg Reformation.

A careful review of the sermons reveals an *inventio* drenched with law. In these eight sermons alone, Luther employed law in at least 96 specific instances. Furthermore, the third use of the law is not peripheral, but central to his proclamation. He featured the law in its first use no fewer than 10 times, in its second use no fewer than 25 times, and in its third use no fewer than 61 times.

Luther's *dispositio* of law and gospel in these sermons featured a significant imbalance towards law. In fact, Luther only explicated gospel promises 3 times in the first five sermons, contrasted with at least 60 instances of law. In the sixth sermon, Luther finally extended gospel promises at length, reminding his hearers how the gospel gives them boldness:

If you believe that God steps in for you and stakes all he has and his blood for you, as if he were saying: Fall in behind me without fear or delay, and then let us see what can harm you, for I will be your rear guard and your vanguard; trust me and boldly rely upon me. He who believes that can not be harmed by devil, hell, sin, or

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<sup>30</sup>Brecht, *Luther: 1521-1532*, 61.

death; if God fights for him, what can you do to him?<sup>31</sup>

Luther followed this beautiful gospel reminder with a series of ethical imperatives. He issued similar gospel promises four more times in the final three sermons. Although hearers familiar with Luther's theology would likely assume the gospel throughout the entire series, in this sermon series he rarely made gospel promises explicit. In contrast, he highlighted and explicated legal imperatives with regularity.

Table 6. Law and gospel in the Invocavit Sermons

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	3	--	2	1
Sanctification	6	10	23	60
<i>Total</i>	9	10	25	61

Some might fear that Luther's homiletic replaces one expositional imbalance for another. RHP may suffer from an imbalance towards gospel, but Luther here seems imbalanced towards law. In this light, RHP may seem overwhelmingly preferable. After all, if an imbalance is inevitable let it fall towards gospel, not law. However, Luther's homiletic does not share the heightened view of the sermon characteristic of RHP. Therefore, what may *appear* to be an expositional imbalance towards law is really just an isolated sermon series one must judge in light of his entire preaching ministry. This is not to say that the Invocavit Sermons are atypical of his preaching, as the remaining analyses reveal. Luther sometimes appears imbalanced towards law and other times towards gospel. When his preaching ministry is viewed comprehensively, these apparent imbalances are actually indicative of "gospel dominance."<sup>32</sup> The gospel dominated

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<sup>31</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 93.

<sup>32</sup>Edward A. Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law: Luther's Use of the Law for Christian Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 244-45.

Luther's preaching, not in frequency, but in rank, since the law was proclaimed to serve the purposes of the gospel.

Table 6 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>33</sup> Of note here is the overwhelming appearance of the law in its third use. Even more telling is that Luther directed all but one of these uses towards the believer's sanctification. Figure 7 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

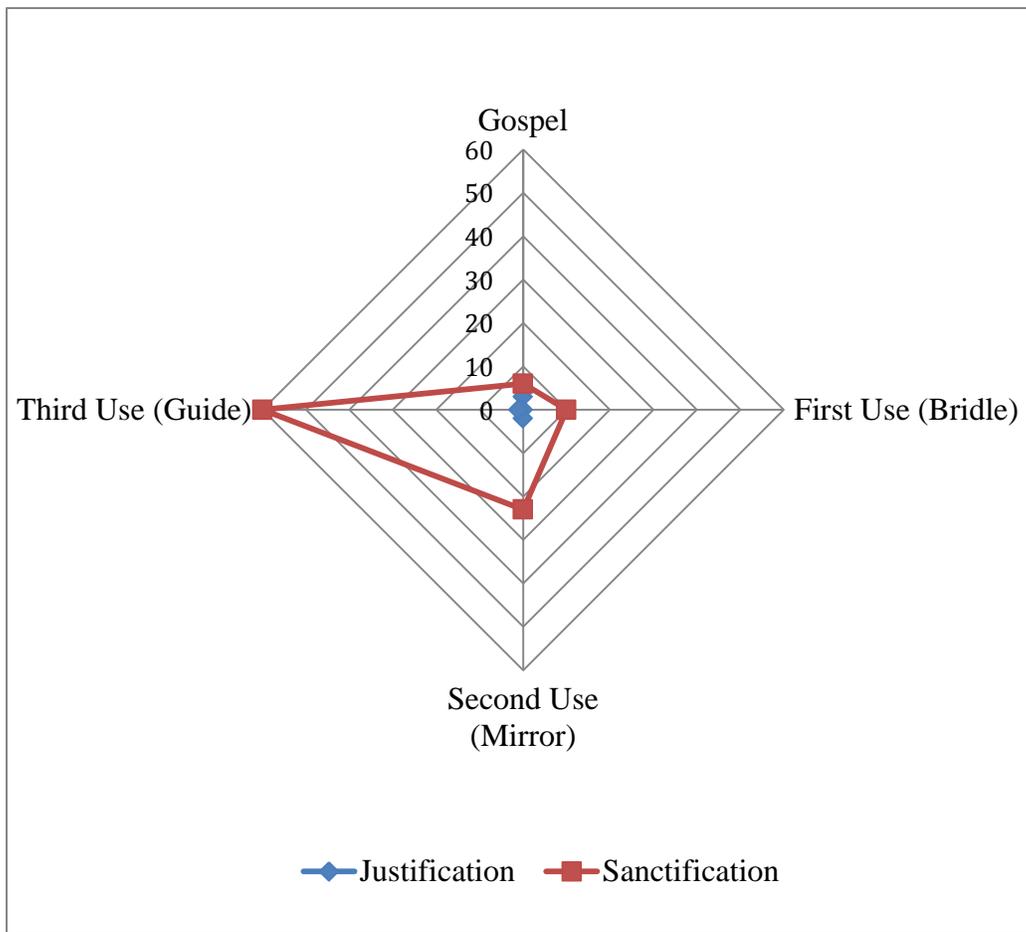


Figure 7. Law and gospel in the Invocavit Sermons

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<sup>33</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

## Redemptive-Historical Analysis

So-called nonredemptive elements plague the *Invocavit* Sermons. With such a preponderance of the third use in these sermons—usually unqualified with gospel caveats—none should deny their highly prescriptive tone. However, what is noteworthy is Luther’s profound ability to encase such preaching in love. Too often prescriptive preaching has been caricatured as legalistic and unloving, a stereotype shattered by the reformer’s example. His love for the Wittenberg congregation is manifest, not in a lack of imperatives, but in their loving issuance. In a slew of unfettered imperatives he still speaks endearingly to his people, calling them “my friends,”<sup>34</sup> “dear lords or pastors,”<sup>35</sup> “dear brother,”<sup>36</sup> “my beloved,”<sup>37</sup> “dear friends,”<sup>38</sup> and “dear brethren.”<sup>39</sup> These sermons are simultaneously dripping with both law and love.

Despite their highly prescriptive nature, the exemplaristic ingredient in these sermons may be even more surprising. Luther repeatedly urged his flock to follow the example of the Apostle Paul, who “preached against . . . idols, but he overthrew none by force.”<sup>40</sup> Luther also referred to Paul’s experience in Athens,<sup>41</sup> his journey towards Rome,<sup>42</sup> his circumcision of Timothy,<sup>43</sup> and his confrontation with Peter<sup>44</sup> as exemplary.

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<sup>34</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 96.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 72, 81.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 71, 72, 75, 81, 84, 90.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 87.

Luther nowhere qualified these exemplaristic statements in any way.

Another example further illustrates Luther's commitment to exemplaristic pleas in the pulpit. Some might consider Luther's exemplaristic use of Paul as saintly compared to the other model he encouraged Wittenberg to emulate: "Dear brethren, follow *me*; I have never been a destroyer. And I was the very first whom God called to this work. I cannot run away, but will remain as long as God allows. I was also the one to whom God first revealed that his Word should be preached to you."<sup>45</sup> Again, he put himself forward as an example in a far more familiar statement:

In short, I will preach it, teach it, write it, but I will constrain no man by force, for faith must come freely without compulsion. *Take myself as an example*. I opposed indulgences and all the papists, but never with force. I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.<sup>46</sup>

These examples suggest that exemplaristic preaching was not incidental to the Reformation, but crucial to its survival.

### Jude

Luther's sermon on the epistle of Jude represents the only sermon included from the Apostle Jude's writings.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, it is the only exposition included from 1523. Luther's sermon is based on the entire epistle of Jude, which urges the church to "contend for the faith" (Jude 1:3) by opposing false teachers and obeying the truth.

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<sup>44</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 87–88.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 72–73, emphasis added.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 77. Emphasis added. Luther also rebukes the Wittenberg congregation for their unwillingness to follow his example in his fifth sermon (91).

<sup>47</sup>To read these sermons in their entirety, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 30, *The Catholic Epistles*, ed. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 203–215. Also, *WA*, 14: 75–91.

## Contextual Analysis

The disturbance in Wittenberg largely subsided after Luther's intervention. Meanwhile, the young reformer kept busy in efforts to spread the truth of evangelical theology. In September 1522, he published his translation of the New Testament into German. That fall he devoted considerable attention to a Protestant understanding of governmental authority.<sup>48</sup> Yet, despite his prolific pen, Luther believed his most important contributions were in the pulpit. Brecht explains,

During [this period] he usually identified himself in letters and in the titles of his publications as the "Ecclesiast," the preacher at Wittenberg. To be sure, he had occupied the position of preacher at the city church since 1514, but now more than ever he considered it his proper office. . . . It is not easy to portray the period between 1522 and 1524. . . . Nevertheless, the office of preaching the gospel is to be seen as the center of Luther's task and activity as he conceived it at that time.<sup>49</sup>

During this period, Luther began a series of Sunday afternoon sermons on various books of the Bible, beginning with 1 Peter in May 1522 and continuing with 2 Peter and Jude in early 1523.<sup>50</sup> This exposition of Jude was preached as two sermons; verses 1-13 on February 22 and verses 12-25 on the following Sunday. Although George Rörer's transcription confirms that Luther actually preached this epistle, the published version of these notes appear more like a sermonic commentary, with the preacher's remarks following each verse in printed form. Nevertheless, these sermons still provide considerable insight into Luther's preaching.

## Textual Analysis

Jude's epistle is "nothing more than an epistle directed against our clerics—

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<sup>48</sup>Although he did not publish *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* until the spring of 1523, the topic was central in Luther's thoughts during this period, as evidenced by his preaching. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 153.

<sup>49</sup>Brecht, *Luther: 1521-1532*, 57–58.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

bishops, priests, and monks.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, Luther began his exposition with a scathing rebuke of the papacy. He consistently and repeatedly applied Jude’s remarks against false teachers to the clerics and their ilk. Indeed, the bulk of the exposition is devoted to exposing the bankruptcy of their supposed righteousness. For instance, “we know that no one becomes pious and righteous by reason of his own works but solely through faith in Christ, in reliance on Christ’s work as his chief treasure.”<sup>52</sup> Luther’s hearers would do well to believe this gospel and reject the spiritual poverty of the papacy.

However, this exposition did more than merely reject the errors of legalism. Luther also rebuked the damning danger of licentiousness. Many professing Christians claim to uphold the gospel, but their lives indicate otherwise. These people “call themselves Christians and put the gospel on display; but at the same time they live in an estate in which they are completely wanton in eating, drinking, and rascally living.”<sup>53</sup> The implication is clear: such persons will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Luther also rejected the error of laziness. It is not enough to discard legalism and licentiousness; the true Christian must pursue good works. Nevertheless, the Christian must properly understand these works: “When faith is present, all the works man does should redound to the welfare of his neighbor; and one should beware of all works that are not done with the service of one’s neighbor in mind.”<sup>54</sup> Good works are resultant from faith, not prerequisites for it. Moreover, the Christian directs them towards neighbor, not towards God as if one could assuage his wrath by good behavior.

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<sup>51</sup>Luther, *LW*, 30: 203.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

## Rhetorical Analysis

Luther's *inventio* in these sermons was overwhelmingly devoted to the second use of the law. On no fewer than 27 occasions, he upheld the mirror of law to expose the wretchedness of sin, this in contrast to 3 instances of the first use and 13 instances of the third. In addition, this sermon is noteworthy in the way Luther employed the second use. The majority of these instances focused on the clerics, not necessarily his Wittenberg congregation. Nevertheless, on several occasions Luther extended his application to his hearers. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the entirety of these instances were relevant to *all* who believed and behaved similarly. The clerics were merely the focal point by proxy for all who foolishly clung to works righteousness.

Luther's *dispositio* was equally important to these sermons. A careful review of their arrangement of law reveals an important principle: the preacher's use of the law should properly reflect the emphasis of the text. The epistle of Jude features few imperatives; the bulk of the letter indicatively pronounces judgment on false teachers. The same emphasis on indicatives and imperatives prevails in Luther's preaching. With very few exceptions, the instances where Luther employed the third use are overwhelmingly where Jude features imperatives.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, Luther employed the indicative nature of the second use primarily where Jude does the same.

Table 7. Law and gospel in Jude

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	3	3	25	--
Sanctification	2	--	2	13
<i>Total</i>	5	3	27	13

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<sup>55</sup>Jude 3, 20-23.

Table 7 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in these sermons.<sup>56</sup> Of note here is the overwhelming utilization of the law in its second use. Even though Luther repeatedly employed the second use to reveal the lack of saving faith, when he utilized the third use in these sermons, he always did so to spur his hearers on towards growth in sanctification. Figure 8 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

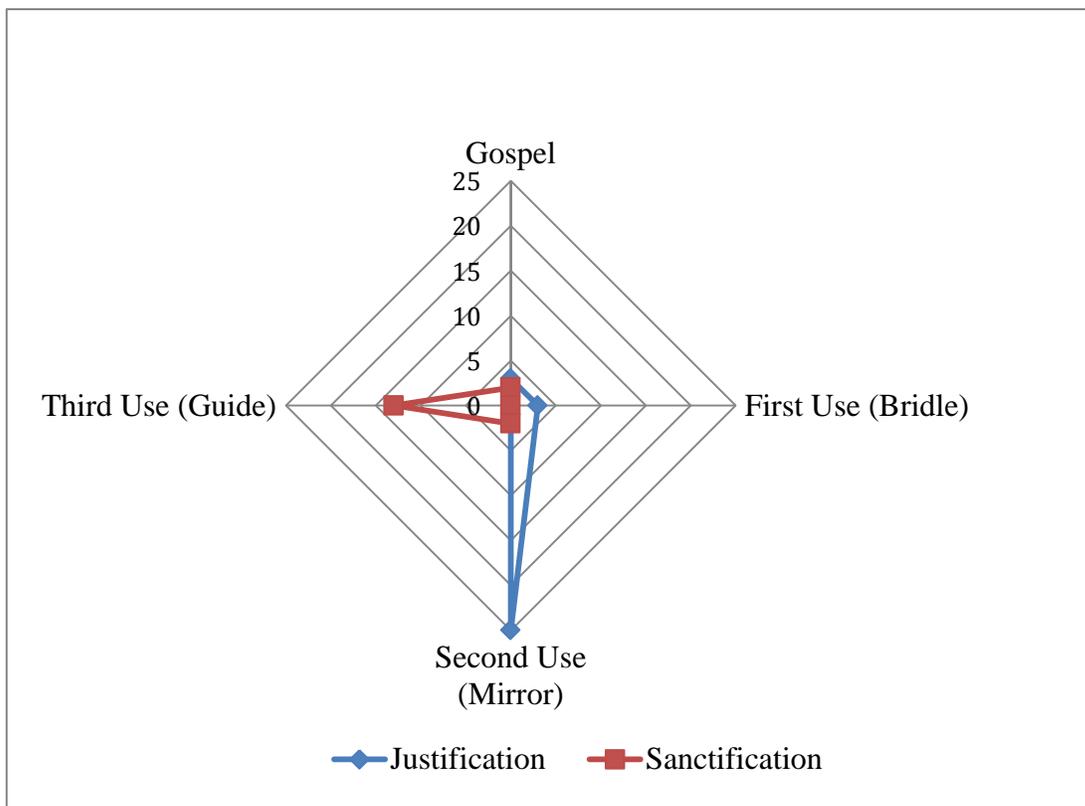


Figure 8. Law and gospel in Jude

### Redemptive-Historical Analysis

If George Buchwald is correct, Luther originally split his exposition of Jude

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<sup>56</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

into two parts: verses 1-13 on February 22 and verses 14-25 on March 1.<sup>57</sup> This reality is particularly troubling for the ardent redemptive-historical preacher. The exposition as a whole would likely cause little concern, but viewing the two halves individually leads to a sub-Christian result at best. Yes, Luther did mention gospel truth in the initial sermon, but its primary focus was to expose the sinfulness of the clerics. Luther's sermons are unquestionably Christ-centered, but not always in the same way. When one views these sermons in isolation, the former simmers with law while the latter is fragrant with grace. What the redemptive-historical theorist might refute as a sub-Christian inconsistency, Luther upheld as a faithful exposition of the gospel.

### **Matthew 11:25-30**

Luther's 1525 sermon on Matthew 11:25-30 is included to help demonstrate the reformer's homiletical progression.<sup>58</sup> His 1517 sermon on the same text offered the first glance on the preacher's homiletical handling of this passage. There Luther delivered a strong Christ-centered exposition, albeit a flawed one. He failed on occasion to sufficiently qualify his imperatives with gospel indicatives. Furthermore, he employed the patriarch Abram as an exemplar. The result was a sermon replete with mention of Christ, but nonetheless hindered by prescriptive and exemplaristic elements.

The second sermon on Matthew 11:25-30 is the only exposition included from 1525. The sermon was based on Jesus' famous words, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30).

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<sup>57</sup>Per Jaroslav Pelikan, in Luther, *LW*, 30: x.

<sup>58</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 121-32. Also, *WA*, 17: 38-45.

## **Contextual Analysis**

Two years passed between Luther's sermons on Jude and this return to Matthew 11:25-30. This period featured both astounding Reformation growth and tumultuous socio-political upheaval. The reformers organized themselves in these years, aided by works like the publication of the first evangelical hymnal and Luther's *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools*. Nevertheless, the Reformation had also opened the door for radicalism; from the hot-headed impatience of Andreas Carlstadt to the social upheaval wrought by Thomas Müntzer in the Peasants' War.

The Peasant's War began in June 1524 with some isolated revolts in the Black Forest. The lower classes in Germany had few economic resources and even fewer political rights. Encouraged by the success of Luther's conflict with the Roman leviathan, Germany's poor rebelled. Although Luther never approved of these revolts, and distinguished sharply between reform and revolt, many involved in the conflict looked to him as an idealistic figurehead. Luther preached this second sermon on Matthew 11:25-30 on February 5, 1525, during the peak of this conflict.

## **Textual Analysis**

Luther began by distinguishing between two types of wisdom. "True wisdom," he explained, "is nothing else than the knowledge of God, that is, when I know what I am to think of God and know his divine will."<sup>59</sup> The wisdom in verse twenty-five is "worldly wisdom, which puffs people up and will not admit the true, divine wisdom."<sup>60</sup>

The effects of this worldly wisdom are multitudinous. Worldly wisdom leads to a selfish motivation, where people call "good" only what is good for them personally.

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<sup>59</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 123.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*

Worldly wisdom encroaches into spiritual matters. It forsakes God for fleshly images. It makes understanding the things of God impossible. Perhaps its worst effect is hindering people from understanding the gospel.

Luther urged his hearers entrapped by worldly wisdom to repent and trust in Christ alone for wisdom. True wisdom is a *revealed* wisdom, which excludes boasting. Here the heavy-laden can find true rest. However, this is not a rest *from* trials and temptations, but a rest *through* them. Sin still tempts the Christian. He will still need prayer. She will still need to endure hardships. However, these trials and temptations no longer appear as a heavy yoke of law. The Christian endures "cheerfully, willingly, and gladly" because Christ is a co-laborer.<sup>61</sup> The yoke "is called gentle, sweet, and easy because he himself helps us carry it, and when it grows too heavy for us he shoulders the burden along with us."<sup>62</sup>

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

In the second sermon on this text, Luther's *inventio* tilted towards the law in its final two uses. He employed the first use 1 time, reminding his hearers that God will abandon all who deny his Word. The second use was predominant in this sermon; on no fewer than 16 occasions, Luther used its mirror to expose the worldly wisdom of his hearers. He employed the imperatival force of the third use at least 13 times.

Many of these instances are in respect to the *initial imperative*, namely, that sinners must come to Christ and receive the gospel. Papists should repent; sinners should likewise come, disregarding their worth; they should "come confidently and boldly;"<sup>63</sup> they should "believe,"<sup>64</sup> "receive,"<sup>65</sup> and "accept"<sup>66</sup> this gospel. Regarding the *subsequent*

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<sup>61</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 132.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

*imperative* to pursue sanctification, Christians must reject meritorious thinking,<sup>67</sup> rejoice in Christ,<sup>68</sup> pray (and enlist the prayers of others) during trials,<sup>69</sup> not fall away,<sup>70</sup> and endure persecution without despair.<sup>71</sup>

Table 8. Law and gospel in Matthew 11:25-30 (1525)

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	9	1	14	6
Sanctification	8	--	2	7
<i>Total</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>13</i>

Unlike the first sermon on this text, a pattern emerges here in Luther's *dispositio* of law and gospel. He began with a considerable focus on the law in its second use, exposing worldly wisdom and the inability of sinners to perceive the truth about Christ. He then transitioned towards the gospel reality of revelation, that God opens the eyes of sinners to behold the glorious truth about Christ. He to whom the Father reveals this truth can "rejoice that he is in the hands of this Christ and need not be troubled by his sins."<sup>72</sup> Yes, the devil will tempt him but "there is no need to be troubled, for he has a

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<sup>65</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 130.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*

strong, mighty King; he will defend him well.”<sup>73</sup>

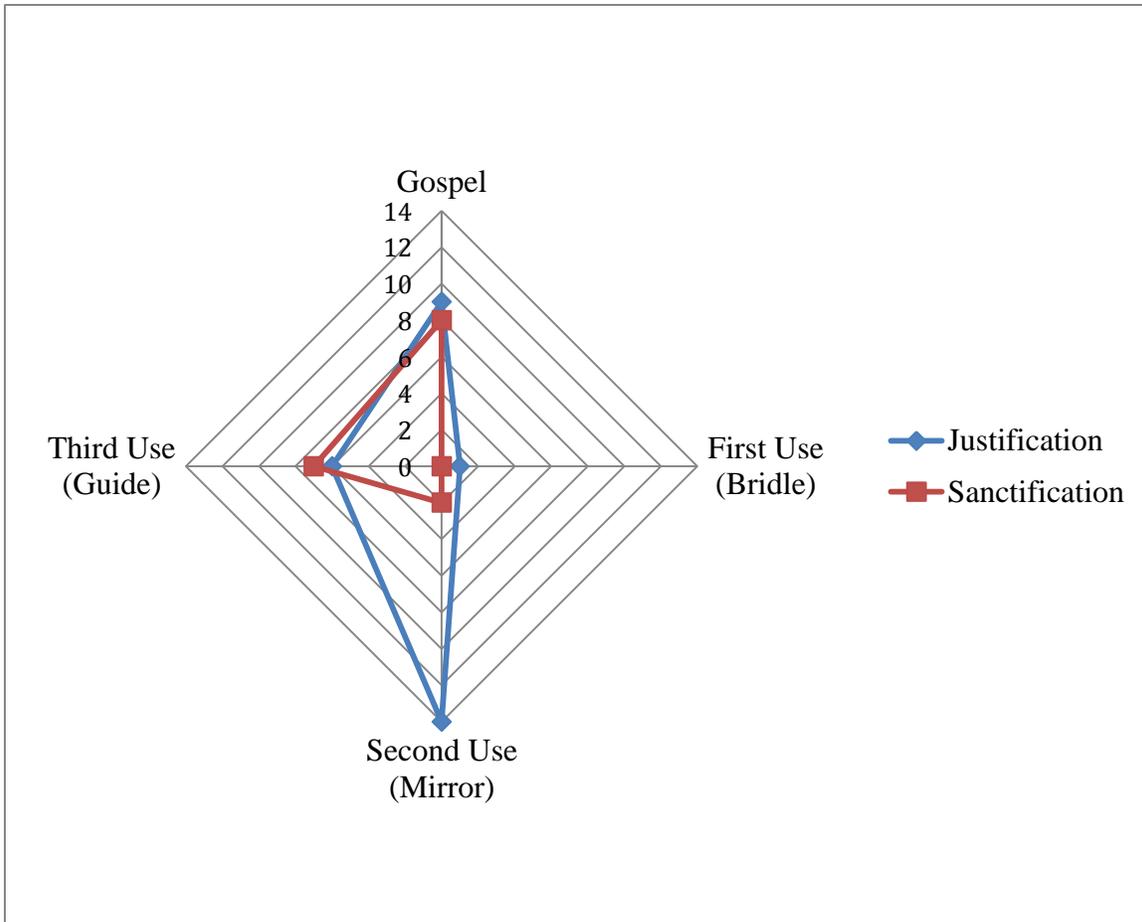


Figure 9. Law and gospel in Matthew 11:25-30 (1525)

Gospel realities such as these permeate the remainder of the sermon. Nevertheless, they do not appear alone, but frequently followed by imperatives. For example, “One thing is certain; you will not be forsaken. Christ will surely save you. There is no need to worry, but only *do not fall from his kingdom*.”<sup>74</sup> Again, “I will give

<sup>73</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 128.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.* Emphasis added.

you rest,' [Christ] says to those who are oppressed, as it were, with hard labor and toil. But *see to it only that you believe* this friendly bidding and assurance."<sup>75</sup> This pattern of gospel followed by law appears throughout the second half of this sermon.

Table 8 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>76</sup> This is a particularly well balanced sermon, other than the virtual neglect of the first use. Figure 9 above offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

### **Redemptive-Historical Analysis**

Emanuel Hirsch remarks that this sermon is "one of the richest and most thoughtful of all his sermons which sum up his faith in Christ."<sup>77</sup> Indeed, here Luther prominently featured the rich promises of Christ in the gospel. Nevertheless, this sermon occasionally fails to comply with redemptive-historical standards, evidenced by a failure to qualify legal imperatives with gospel indicatives. For example, he admonished his hearers to persevere in the discipline of prayer: Christians should pray because life is hard. Luther explains, "It will be hard for you, it will be bitter; therefore prayer will be needed and others too will have to pray for you, that you may have strong courage and a brave heart to withstand the devil."<sup>78</sup> Luther did not qualify this imperative, leaving it as naked law. He did not remind his hearers that their prayer could not merit God's favor; he simply urged them to pray. Although many would be satisfied with Luther's exposition, a strict application of redemptive-historical principles results in another sermon plagued by deadly "Be good" elements.

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<sup>75</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 129. Emphasis added.

<sup>76</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

<sup>77</sup>Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke in Auswahl*, ed. Otto Clemen and Albert Leitzmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 392, as quoted in Luther, *LW*, 51: 121.

<sup>78</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 128.

## Sermon on the Catechism

A sample from Luther's 1528 *Sermons on the Catechism* is included due to its historical relevance.<sup>79</sup> These sermons were crucial in the development of the vocabulary that would eventually become Luther's Large and Small Catechisms.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, this sermon represents the only exposition included from 1528. Of particular note for this dissertation is Luther's homiletical handling of the Ten Commandments. Therefore, the first sermon from this series—an exposition of the First Commandment—is analyzed below. The First Commandment states, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod 20:3).

### Contextual Analysis

The contrast between Wittenberg at the outset of Luther's ministry and in November 1528 could not be starker. Luther no longer preached in a gospel-parched milieu, but to congregants acutely aware of the power of grace. However, the transition from the terrors of the law to the recognition of grace by faith alone was not an easy one. As already seen, the Reformation opened the door for radicalism; from the impatience of Carlstadt to the violence of Müntzer, but no challenge was more formidable to Luther than the doctrine of his former pupil, Johannes Agricola.<sup>81</sup>

As early as 1525, Agricola began to deviate from Luther's law-gospel dialectic. In his zeal for the gospel, Agricola began to diminish the importance of the law in his preaching. This departure from Luther's thought was especially disconcerting for the

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<sup>79</sup>To read this sermon series in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 137-93. Also, *WA*, 30<sup>1</sup>: 57-122. The introductory sermon, under consideration here, is on pages 137-41 in *LW*.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>81</sup>For a helpful treatment of this controversy, see Mark U. Edwards Jr., *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), 156–79. Interestingly, Lohse concludes his section on the historical development of Luther's theology with this controversy, indicating that here Luther's theological maturation is complete. Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 178–84.

reformer. Trueman explains, "Luther seriously feared that law-gospel preaching in Germany has by 1527 become merely gospel preaching. And preaching that is merely gospel preaching is not gospel preaching at all."<sup>82</sup> In other words, the failure to maintain a law/gospel dialectic does not preach the gospel too *much*, but too *narrowly*.

In the midst of this controversy, Luther began several series of sermons on the Catechism. He preached the first series from May 18 to May 30, 1528 and the second from September 14 to September 25. The final series, under consideration here, consisted of short sermons preached every afternoon, four days a week, from November 30 to December 18. It is beyond the scope of this study to consider every sermon in this series. Therefore, analysis of the introductory sermon on the first commandment follows.

### **Textual Analysis**

Luther began his sermon on the first commandment by stressing the importance of the series. Christians who claim to love God should strive to know and understand the catechism. A believer cannot speak honestly about his or her love for God without a desire to know and understand the things of God. Luther went beyond merely admonishing his people to catechize by adding weight to his commands: "I have admonished you adults to hold your children and servants and yourselves to this; otherwise we shall not admit you to holy communion."<sup>83</sup> He continued, "A person who wants to be a good citizen owes it to his family to urge them to learn these portions of the catechism, and if they will not, do not give them any bread to eat. If the servants grumble, then throw them out of the house."<sup>84</sup> This is especially urgent, since "every father of a family is a bishop in his house and the wife a bishopess. Therefore remember that you in

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<sup>82</sup>Carl Trueman, "Tools for the Trade" (Gheens Lecture, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, September 12, 2012).

<sup>83</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 137.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*

your homes are to help us carry on the ministry as we do in the church."<sup>85</sup>

After his introductory comments on the importance of the catechism, Luther shifted to the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me."<sup>86</sup> He began this portion of the discourse by explaining the meaning of the commandment: "He who fears God and trusts him is keeping this commandment, but he who fears something else and trusts it is transgressing. . . . There is nothing to be found in it except that we must fear God and trust him."<sup>87</sup> This fear and trust is necessary because of God's character: "My God says that he wills to be gracious to me; him alone must I fear and trust. If [others] want to give you riches, you already have another treasure, which is trust in God alone."<sup>88</sup> It is God alone "who says: If you fear me and trust me, I will protect you and supply you with nourishment and all that you need and you shall have what is sufficient. Therefore fear nobody but me, for I can smite you, and put your trust in none but me, for I can help you."<sup>89</sup>

Luther concluded the sermon by explaining the universal application of its truths: "One becomes greatly learned through this commandment; for when the family fears and trusts God you will be able to deal well with every external situation."<sup>90</sup> The wisdom that flows from understanding this commandment flows into every aspect of life. The Wittenberg elect should be comforted because "in the course of time [they] will learn to apply it well in every situation and action."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 137.

<sup>86</sup>Exod 20:3.

<sup>87</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 138.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 141.

## Rhetorical Analysis

Luther's *inventio* in this sermon slanted towards the law in its third use. He employed the first use twice, threatening his hearers with expulsion from the sacrament, and God's judgment, respectively. Luther utilized the second use 11 times, mostly to accuse parents who did not teach their children the catechism and sinners who did not rightly fear God. He employed the third use 28 times, mostly to command his hearers to correct the failures revealed by the second use.

Table 9. Law and gospel in the sermon on the catechism

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	1	--	4	--
Sanctification	5	2	7	28
<i>Total</i>	6	2	11	28

Luther's arrangement of law and gospel is also noteworthy. He began with undiluted law:

One who does not know [the catechism] should not be counted among the number of Christians. . . . Hold your children and servants and yourselves to this; otherwise we shall not admit you to holy communion. . . . [If your children] will not, do not give them any bread to eat. If the servants grumble, then throw them out of the house. . . . I am not saying this for nothing; I am determined that you shall not cast it to the winds. I should never have believed that you were such ignorant people if I did not learn it every day.<sup>92</sup>

These words are just a portion of Luther's hard-nosed introduction. He did not begin by proclaiming the providing, resurrecting Word of God, but by reciting the law's demands. Furthermore, he did not immediately follow up this proclamation of law with a gospel rejoinder. His introduction contained nothing but demands.

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<sup>92</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 137.

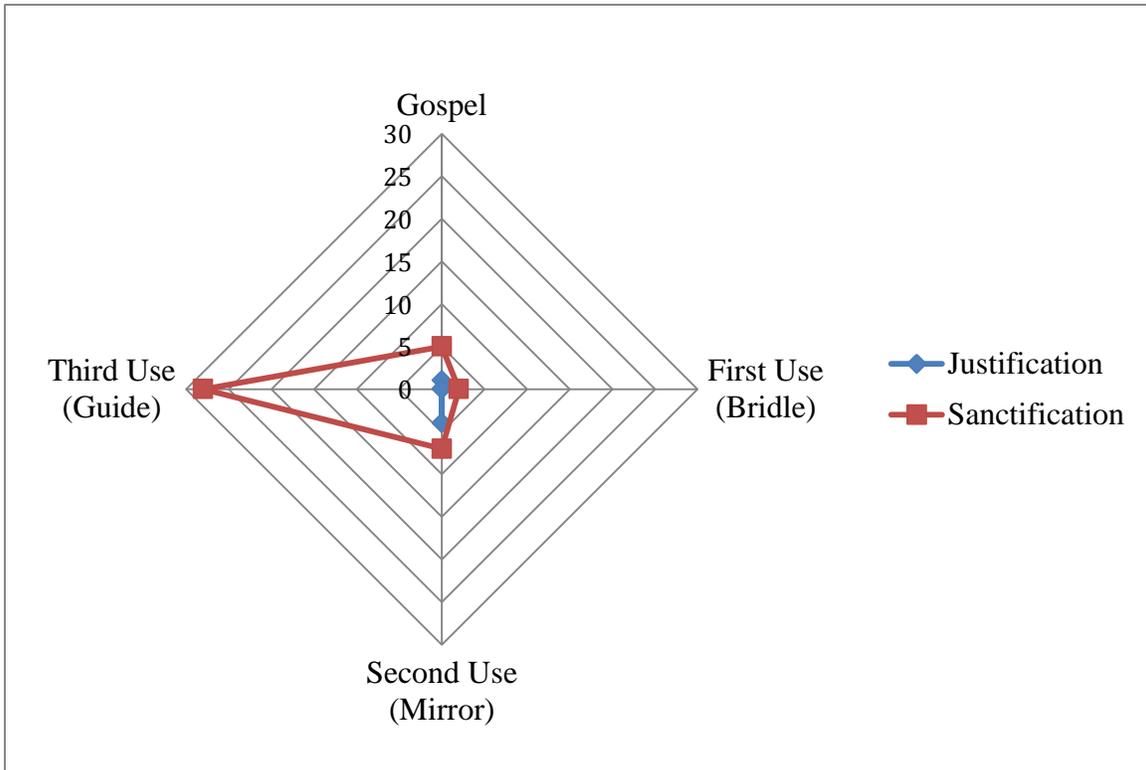


Figure 10. Law and gospel in the sermon on the catechism

As Luther commenced his treatment of the first commandment, he returned to a law-gospel antithesis. Once again, he started with law:

If you won't learn [the first commandment], then you shall be of the devil. . . . We must fear God and trust him. . . . One who fears something else and trusts it makes of it a god. . . . If you fear the prince more than God, then the prince is your god. If you trust your wife or money more than God, then these are your god.<sup>93</sup>

Unlike his introduction, Luther here proclaimed the gospel on the heels of the law: God says to his children, "If you fear me and trust me, I will protect you and supply you with nourishment and all that you need and you shall have what is sufficient."<sup>94</sup> This was gospel for Luther's audience because they could find motivation to fear and trust God, not in the threats of the law, but in the beauty of the promise.

<sup>93</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 138–39.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

Although the major focus of this sermon was law, Luther did occasionally preach the gospel from the first commandment. However, he appeared to be under no formulaic constraints to balance his time between the two languages of law and gospel.

Table 9 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>95</sup> The abundance of the third use is of particular significance here. Figure 10 above offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

### **Redemptive-Historical Analysis**

Luther's first sermon on the catechism was a notable example of a prescriptive sermon. Luther began with a scathing rebuke for those who failed to teach their children the catechism: "One who does not know them should not be counted among the number of Christians. For when a person does not know this, it is a sign that he has no regard for God and Christ."<sup>96</sup> He continued, "One who does not know it should not call himself a Christian, but belongs body and soul to the devil, and it will never go well with him here and hereafter."<sup>97</sup>

Rather than following these accusatory statements with gospel encouragement, Luther shifted from accusations to injunctions. He resounded with a flurry of imperatives: "hold your children and servants and yourselves to [learning the catechism]; otherwise we shall not admit you to holy communion."<sup>98</sup> Those who refused to learn should receive neither food nor shelter.<sup>99</sup> Parents could accomplish this necessary training by "praying in the morning when you rise, in the evening when you go to bed, and before and after

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<sup>95</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

<sup>96</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 137.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*

meals.”<sup>100</sup> All this was necessary because “God has appointed you a master and a wife in order that you should hold your family to this.”<sup>101</sup>

Despite the abundance of law, what is most damning from a redemptive-historical perspective was Luther’s widespread failure to qualify these imperatives with gospel promises. In fact, he seemed to do the opposite in one of the only instances where he utilized the gospel, “*If* we do this we shall have a gracious God, who will defend us from all evil and in all evil.”<sup>102</sup> No honest student of Luther could accuse him of holding to a theology of works righteousness. Nevertheless, Luther’s introductory *if* seemed to suggest just that. A macroscopic view of the reformer’s preaching would put any rumors of latent legalism to rest, but a consistent application of RHP’s heightened emphasis on the individual sermon would likely reject this exposition as another sub-Christian sermon.

### **On the Cross and Suffering**

Luther’s sermon *On the Cross and Suffering* is included for its historical relevance.<sup>103</sup> This sermon is noteworthy for its passionate portrayal of the suffering of Christ and his church, preached during a historical moment where persecution seemed imminent. Its brilliant presentation of Luther’s law-gospel paradigm warrants its inclusion. Furthermore, this sermon represents the only exposition included from 1530. The sermon is not based on any particular text, but is a topical treatment of Christ’s passion.

### **Contextual Analysis**

In October 1529, the Marburg Colloquy ended in utter failure. Despite several

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<sup>100</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 137.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see *ibid.*, 197–208. Also, *WA*, 32: 28-39.

days of heated theological debate, Zwingli and Luther reached an impasse due to a profound disagreement regarding the sacrament. Any hopes for a unified Protestantism seemed crushed. The burgeoning movement felt more fractured than ever, an especially troubling development given the steady rise of fanaticism.

These seemingly dire circumstances led Emperor Charles V to summon a diet in Augsburg. Brecht explains, “He was concerned about arriving at a uniform, Christian truth, doing away with everything incorrectly interpreted on either side, and restoring the unity of the church.”<sup>104</sup> On March 11, 1530, Elector John received his summons to attend the diet and summarily invited Luther, Melancthon, Agricola, and others to join him.

Luther and the Wittenberg theologians would stay at a fortress in nearby Coburg. After all, Luther was still under the ban from the Diet of Worms and could not safely appear in Augsburg. On Good Friday, the company reached their destination. The following day, on April 16, 1530, Luther preached an impassioned sermon *On Cross and Suffering*.

### **Textual Analysis**

While many hearers would naturally be meditating upon the crucifixion, Luther aimed to address the Passion narrative exemplaristically. He wished to address not the nature of Christ’s suffering or the reasons for it, but the “example which this Passion gives to us, what kind of cross we bear and suffer, and also how we should bear and suffer it.”<sup>105</sup> Many “false fanatics” accused the reformers of having “nothing else to teach and preach except faith alone.”<sup>106</sup> Luther desired to set the record straight by preaching a sermon on Christian suffering. He began, “Though our suffering and cross should never

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<sup>104</sup>Brecht, *Luther: 1521-1532*, 369.

<sup>105</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 198.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*

be so exalted that we think we can be saved by it or earn the least merit through it, nevertheless we should suffer after Christ, that we may be conformed to him.”<sup>107</sup> Only Christ’s suffering achieves *salvation*, but Christian suffering is necessary for *sanctification*.

Luther explained three primary truths regarding suffering. First, Jesus suffered as an example, a truth repeated throughout the New Testament that Christians must not reject. To refuse to suffer is to deny Christ. However, this does not mean Christians should go about choosing suffering, as the fanatics do. Rather, they should patiently bear suffering when it comes by meditating on the superior treasure that Christ offers to those who persevere. Luther illustrated this endurance with a meditation on the story of Saint Christopher.<sup>108</sup>

Second, the believer’s confidence during suffering should not be in works, but in the Word of God. “Even though we are not such good Christians as we ought to be and are timid and weak both in life and faith, He will nevertheless defend his Word simply because it is his Word.”<sup>109</sup> Therefore, Christians should endure suffering by clinging to the promises of Scripture.

Third, Christians should understand the reasons for suffering. They suffer to be conformed to the image of Christ. They suffer because the devil hates them. They suffer to protect them from spiritual slumber: “We see so many people . . . so misusing the gospel that it is a sin and a shame, as if now of course they have been so liberated by the gospel that there is no further need to do anything, give anything, or suffer anything.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 198.

<sup>108</sup>Saint Christopher, according to ancient legend, was conscripted to carry a child on his back. The child was initially unknown to him, but Christopher later learned that the child was Christ. Christopher’s journey was filled with trials, but the presence of Christ allowed him to find joy through suffering.

<sup>109</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 205.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 207.

Christian suffering aptly counters such misuses of the gospel.

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

The *inventio* in this lengthy sermon leaned decidedly towards the third use of the law. Twice Luther used the law as a bridle, 6 times as a mirror, and 24 times as a guide. The result was an immensely practical sermon designed to instruct Christians on how to suffer well. His *inventio* also revealed the importance of both law and gospel to the reformer's homiletic. His response to accusations that the reformers "have nothing else to teach and preach except faith alone" betrayed his desire for preaching that advocates obedience.<sup>111</sup> Such preaching does not abandon the gospel, as demonstrated by the explicit gospel references to the salvific exclusivity of Christ's suffering.

The *dispositio* of law and gospel in this sermon allows one to glimpse the paradox of a thoroughly Christ-centered sermon laced with potent imperatives. Luther commenced with gospel; after all, any explanation of Christian suffering must explicate its atoning insufficiency. However, what followed was a steady barrage of commands to "suffer,"<sup>112</sup> "be crucified,"<sup>113</sup> "bear a part of the holy cross,"<sup>114</sup> "hold fast,"<sup>115</sup> "submit,"<sup>116</sup> and "accept all suffering."<sup>117</sup> While Luther occasionally qualified these imperatives with gospel truth,<sup>118</sup> he appeared under no obligation to follow every

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<sup>111</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 198.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, 198, 199, 207.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, 198, 199, 207.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 199, 200.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>118</sup>For example, after one imperative he states, "We earn nothing by our suffering." *Ibid.*, 199 See also, 205 and 208.

imperative with a gospel caveat.

Table 10. Law and gospel in *On the Cross and Suffering*

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	3	2	2	--
Sanctification	14	--	4	24
<i>Total</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>24</i>

Table 10 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>119</sup> The abundance of the third use is of particular significance here, as is the significant number of gospel promises coupled with those legal imperatives. Figure 11 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

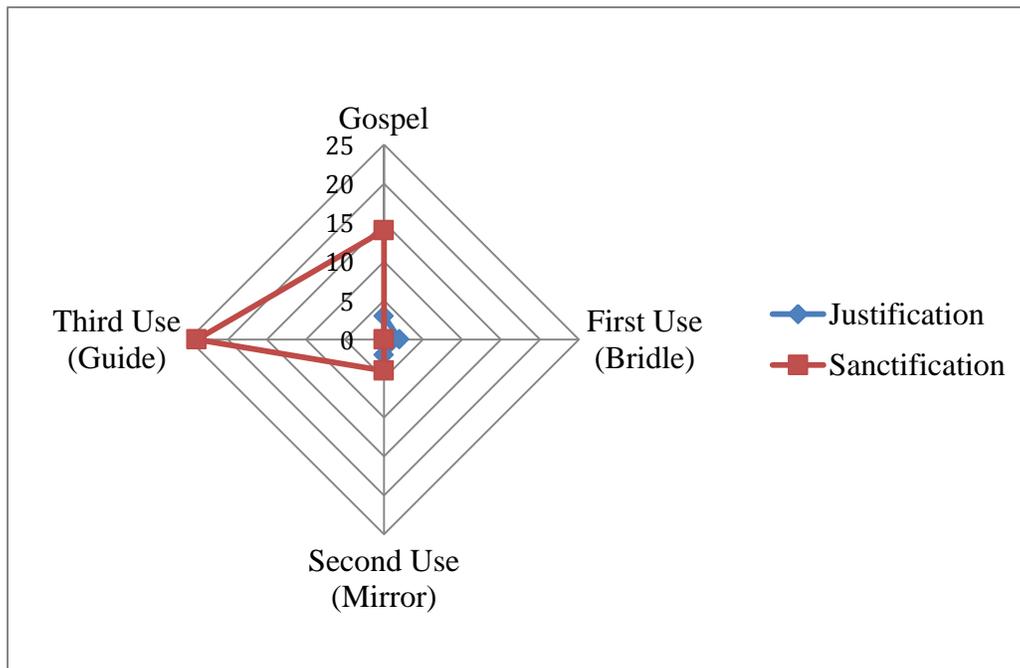


Figure 11. Law and gospel in *On the Cross and Suffering*

<sup>119</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

## Redemptive-Historical Analysis

The wealth of unqualified imperatives in this sermon reveals a major prescriptive element. Although Luther clearly rejected all of the problems that “Be good” sermons allegedly create—justification by works, mere moralism, blurring sanctification and justification, connecting God’s love with obedience, and mere duty as the impetus for obedience—he nonetheless appeared unconcerned by the presence of so much naked law in his pulpit.

In addition to the prescriptive elements, both exhortative and exemplaristic features are present. First, the entire sermon is an exposition of Christ as an example. The preacher explains, “Christ by his suffering not only saved us from the devil, death, and sin, but also that his suffering is an example, which we are to follow in our suffering.”<sup>120</sup> Chapell suggests that using Christ as *exemplum* actually hurts the listener, unless the preacher “simultaneously remind[s] them that his standards are always beyond them, apart from his enabling grace.”<sup>121</sup> Luther did not simultaneously issue such reminders in this sermon; in fact, they are absent entirely.

Second, the sermon’s practical instructions on suffering betray an exhortative theme. Luther issued immensely practical commands to help his hearers “be disciplined” in their suffering. They should “think of Christ;”<sup>122</sup> “learn the art of looking to the Word and looking away from all the trouble and suffering;”<sup>123</sup> “drive the suffering and cross from your mind as quickly as you can;”<sup>124</sup> “look to the Word;”<sup>125</sup> and “arm,” “defend”

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<sup>120</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 198.

<sup>121</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 290.

<sup>122</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 200.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, 205.

and “guard” yourself with the comfort of Christ.<sup>126</sup> Although some of these exhortations to obedient suffering are qualified by gospel promises, there are significant exceptions. Luther seemed content to remind his hearers that their suffering was not meritorious; he saw no need to tether each imperative to qualifications regarding the necessity of grace.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14**

Luther's sermon on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 represents the only sermon included based entirely on the Apostle Paul's writings.<sup>127</sup> It also represents Luther's homiletical handling of *epistolary* literature. Furthermore, it is the only exposition included from 1532. The sermon is based on Paul's encouragement to the church in Thessalonica: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thess 4:13-14).

### **Contextual Analysis**

After returning from Coburg, Luther became increasingly busy. One of his preaching colleagues at the Castle Church took an extended absence, forcing him to assume more responsibilities. For several years, he was “smothered with work.”<sup>128</sup> The unhappy result of his workload was a significant deterioration in health. Problems like ringing in his ears, pain in his throat, fainting spells, weariness, and kidney stones plagued him. At one point he complained, “I don’t like to eat or drink any more. I am already dead. If only I were buried.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 205.

<sup>127</sup>To read Luther’s sermon in its entirety, see *ibid.*, 231–43. Also, *WA*, 36: 237-54

<sup>128</sup>Brecht, *Luther: 1521-1532*, 433.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, 430.

Shortly after his colleague returned and things began to improve, he suffered another setback. On August 15, 1532, Elector John of Saxony died. Although Luther lacked the relationship with John that he once had with Frederick the Wise, the loss was still great. Brecht remarks, “John’s reign was one of the most significant periods of Luther’s activity because of the results achieved during it.”<sup>130</sup> On August 18 at 7:00 a.m., Luther preached the funeral sermon in the Castle Church in Wittenberg. The new elector, John Frederick, appreciated Luther’s funeral sermon so much that he asked him to revisit the same text later that week.

### **Textual Analysis**

Luther began this delicate and poignant exposition with a discussion on the legitimacy of grief. Both Luther and the Apostle Paul had encountered people who esteemed stoicism in the face of loss. Such emotionless behavior was wrong and contrary to Scripture. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to “comfort one another,” but comfort is meaningless without first knowing grief. Nevertheless, when the deceased is a follower of Christ—as was the deceased Elector—the Christian’s grief is necessarily different. Grief is not absent during the loss of a brother in Christ, but it is clothed in hope.

Luther beautifully explains the hope available to grieving Christians by delineating between a believer’s death and the death of Christ. Paul referred to the former as sleep and the latter as real death. The death of a Christian loved one is a mere nap compared to Christ in his Passion, who “died as no one else dies or ever will die.”<sup>131</sup> Luther instructed, “We must learn to look at the death of Christ, through which our own death is destroyed.”<sup>132</sup> Those who loved the Elector should take comfort in his faith in Christ’s death and resurrection. Those who disapproved of his governance should

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<sup>130</sup>Brecht, *Luther: 1521-1532*, 427.

<sup>131</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 234.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, 235.

remember that Jesus swallowed up those sins by his death and resurrection.

Even though the death of a Christian is but sleep, he often encounters a living death through the devil’s *Anfechtung*. Physical death is mere *Kindersterben* (childish death) compared to the “manly death” of spiritual temptation. When Satan tempts the believer in this manner, he must fly to the death of Christ. Luther vividly explained, “Therefore, devil, begone with both my righteousness and my sin. If I have committed some sin, go eat the dung; it’s yours. I’m not worrying about it, for Jesus Christ died.”<sup>133</sup>

### Rhetorical Analysis

Luther’s *inventio* reveals a sermon drenched in gospel truth. Repeatedly he drove his audience to faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. They must meet the attacks of the Devil with firm confidence in the gospel: “Devil, rage as much as you please, I do not boast of my good works and virtues before our Lord God at all, nor shall I despair on account of my sins, but I comfort myself with the fact that Jesus Christ died and rose again.”<sup>134</sup>

Table 11. Law and gospel in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	10	--	--	--
Sanctification	7	1	2	26
<i>Total</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>26</i>

Despite the gospel-centeredness of Luther’s exposition, the law still achieved

<sup>133</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 241.

<sup>134</sup>See also, *ibid.*, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 240, 241, 242, 243 for similar remarks on the power of Christ’s death and resurrection.

prominence. He employed the law in its first use once, near the sermon’s conclusion. The second use appeared twice, almost as bookends. However, the law in its third use appeared twenty-six times. The majority of these imperatives either instructed the mourners to grieve appropriately or commanded them to look to Christ for comfort.

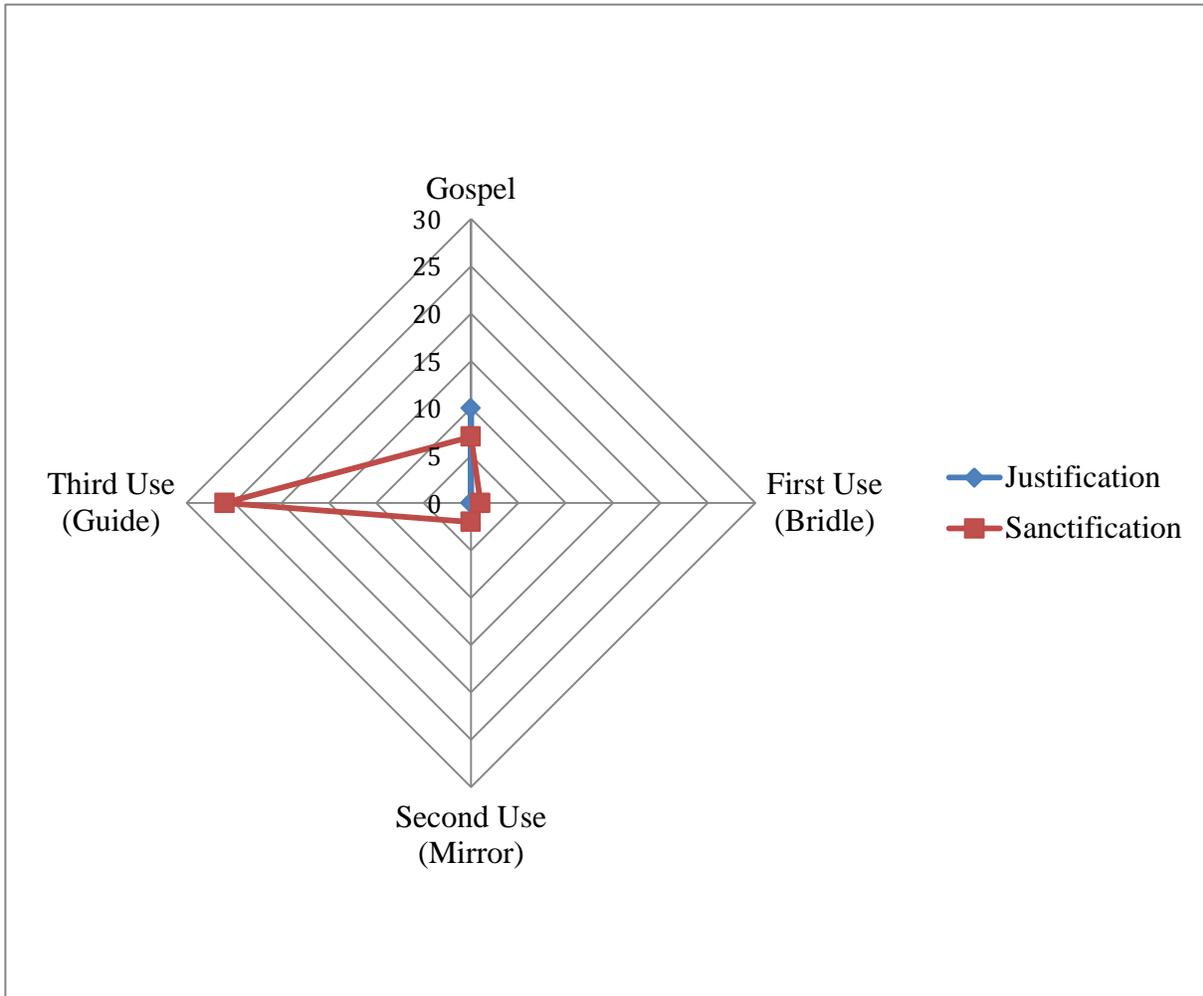


Figure 12. Law and gospel in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

The *dispositio* in this sermon reveals a consistent law-gospel pattern. The preacher began by teaching his hearers how to grieve properly. He then comforted his people, reminding them they can grieve in hope because of Christ’s work. Luther then

instructed his congregation to endure *Anfechtung* by clinging to Christ. This strategy is effective because the promise of the gospel is true, evidenced by Jesus' death and resurrection.

Table 11 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>135</sup> The abundance of the third use is of particular significance here, as is the virtual absence of the law in its first or second uses. Figure 12 above offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

### **Redemptive-Historical Analysis**

Perhaps more than any other sermon analyzed thus far, Luther seemingly avoided any hint of a “sub-Christian” sermon. The sermon was abundant with gospel promises, lacking the harshness sometimes found in his preaching. It had no trace of exemplaristic or exhortative elements. Nevertheless, the sermon was laden with both explicit and implicit imperatives. Luther peppered this prescriptive ingredient throughout the sermon, largely undiluted by gospel caveats. Ironically, these imperatives—so readily eschewed by some redemptive-historical exclusivists—served in this sermon to drive the hearer repeatedly to Christ and his gospel.

### **Summary**

Luther's sermons in mid-career featured a copious supply of unqualified law. The *Invocavit* Sermons were loaded with prescriptive commands unqualified by the gospel. In addition, Luther repeatedly failed to avoid the “Deadly Be” of exemplaristic preaching, presenting the Apostle Paul and Christ as exemplum. His exposition on Jude's epistle yielded an important principle: the preacher's use of the law should properly reflect the emphasis of the text. Luther's homiletical handling of law and gospel mirrored

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<sup>135</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

the text, but he failed to explicate sufficiently the gospel in his first sermon. An exposition on Matthew 11:25-30 yielded similar results. Once again, Luther resorted to a “be good” mentality, urging his congregation to pray without reminding them that prayer is not meritorious. His sermon on the catechism was a fiery prescriptive sermon, sure to make the most moderate Christ-centered protagonist uneasy. His powerful treatment on Christian suffering in Coburg was a comprehensive embrace of exemplaristic preaching. Furthermore, Luther continually urged his hearers to “be disciplined” in the midst of suffering. In the end, only the funeral sermon from 1 Thessalonians 4:13 could possibly escape unscathed.

Table 12. *Usus legis* from 1522-1532

<i>Year</i>	<i>Sermon</i>	<i>Gospel</i>	<i>First Use</i>	<i>Second Use</i>	<i>Third Use</i>
1522	Invocavit Sermons (eight sermons)	9	10	25	61
1523	Jude (two sermons)	5	3	27	13
1525	Matthew 11:25-30	17	1	16	13
1528	Sermon on the Catechism	6	2	11	28
1530	On the Cross and Suffering	17	2	6	24
1532	1 Thessalonians 4:13-14	17	1	2	26
	<i>Total</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>165</i>
	<i>Average</i>	<i>5.07</i>	<i>1.36</i>	<i>6.21</i>	<i>11.79</i>

After reviewing over two decades of Luther’s preaching, the results are somewhat grim. The ardently Christ-centered reformer consistently fails to measure up to redemptive-historical standards. Furthermore, these are not isolated shortcomings. Out of ten sermons analyzed, only three are remotely defensible. Moreover, “Deadly Be’s” in sermons like the Invocavit series are especially significant due to their historical importance.

Table 12 above quantifies the uses of the law in sermons from Luther's mid-

career. He employed the law as bridle an average of 1.36 times per sermon, as mirror 6.21 times per sermon, and as guide 11.79 times per sermon. These numbers are relatively consistent with a more extensive analysis in Appendix Two, although in those sermons Luther employed the third use significantly more than depicted here. Figure 13 below depicts the uses of the law graphically as a percentage of the whole. When he employed the law in these sermons, 61 percent of those instances featured the third use, 32 percent featured the second use, and 7 percent featured the law in its first use. While Luther's utilization of the law as a bridle remained consistent from his early years, his use of the law as guide significantly increased in this epoch. Figure 14 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in Luther's mid-career. Particularly noteworthy is the abundance of legal imperatives in this epoch. Luther devoted significant energies to promoting holiness among his hearers by preaching the law in its third use.

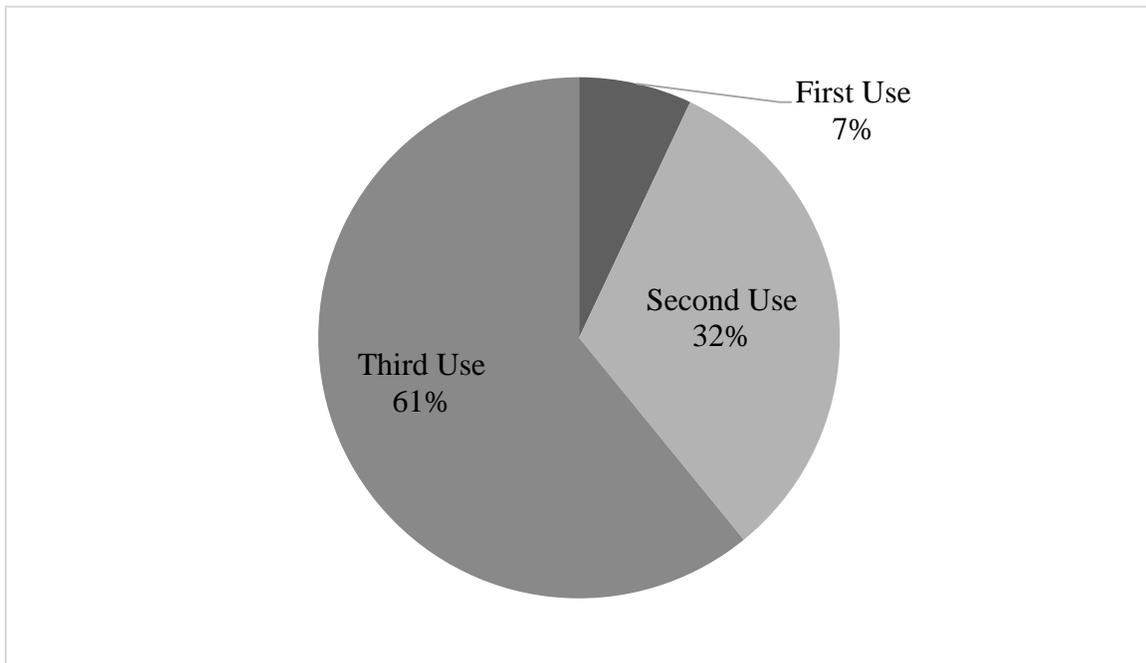


Figure 13. *Usus legis* from 1522-1532

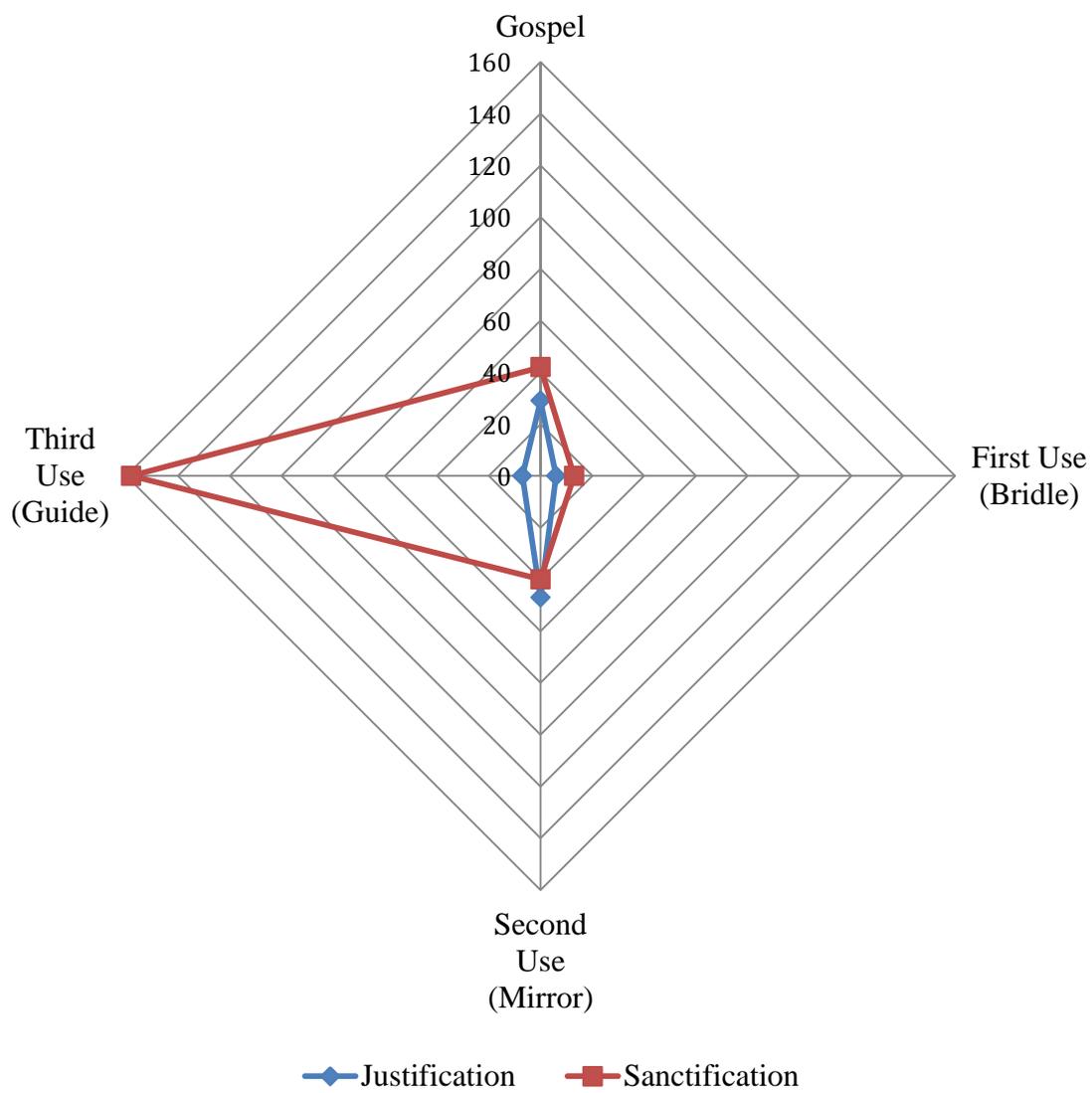


Figure 14. Law and gospel from 1522-1532

CHAPTER 7  
THE MATURE LUTHER: 1533-1546

Chapter five considered Luther's earliest sermons, revealing a predominance of the law in its second use. Chapter six uncovered a noticeable shift towards the law in its third use. This shift is even more evident in fifteen additional sermons analyzed from this epoch.<sup>1</sup> On average, Luther utilized the first use 1.6 times per sermon, the second use 11.67 times, the third use 24.4 times, and the gospel 11.27 times. While Luther's usage of the law as bridle and mirror remained relatively consistent, his utilization of the law as guide escalated considerably. The preaching of the mature Luther is marked by a relative consistency among the final two uses, but a dramatic increase in the first use. He continued to use the law primarily to guide and secondarily to accuse, but his utilization of the threatening first use increased exponentially in his final years.

To uncover this increase, Luther's mature preaching is examined. First, this chapter begins with a sermon exposing the sinfulness of drunkenness from 1 Peter 4:7-11. Second, it explores Luther's exposition of Revelation 12:7-12 preached in 1544. Next, it explores Luther's exegesis of Hosea 13:14 from 1545. Then it considers a 1545 wedding sermon based on Hebrews 13:4, followed by his sermon on Acts 9:1-19 from 1546. Finally, this chapter analyzes a third example of Luther's preaching on Matthew 11:25-30, particularly noteworthy as the last sermon he preached.

**1 Peter 4:7-11**

Luther's sermon on 1 Peter 4:7-11 represents the only sermon included from

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<sup>1</sup>See appendix 2 for detailed analysis.

the Apostle Peter's writings.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, it is the only exposition included from 1539.

The sermon is based on Peter's admonition to the elect exiles:

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Pet 4:7-11).

### **Contextual Analysis**

The final years of the 1530s were no fewer tumultuous than what came before. The radical Anabaptist sect had grown exponentially. Luther's health continued to deteriorate, forcing him to take a break from lecturing in early 1536. The antinomian controversy with John Agricola continued to escalate. However, little affected Luther more deeply than the profligacy that plagued the Wittenberg congregation.

Like many churches, the Wittenberg flock bristled when preachers spoke out against specific sins. Nevertheless, Luther knew he had to speak. A “preacher of light” cannot be silent about whoremongering, greed, profiteering, lying, and deception.”<sup>3</sup> One such example is his sermon on May 18, 1539, a bold condemnation of drunkenness based on 1 Peter 4:7-11.

### **Textual Analysis**

Luther's sermon was a harsh rebuke of the rampant alcoholism in German culture. His scathing rebuke of the practice speaks for itself: “Germany is a land of hogs and a filthy people which debauches its body and its life. If you were going to paint it,

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<sup>2</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 291–99. Also, *WA*, 47: 757-71.

<sup>3</sup>Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532-1546*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 256.

you would have to paint a pig.”<sup>4</sup> Luther believed such an excoriating denouncement of drunkenness was necessary for four reasons.

First, the problem of drunkenness in Germany had escalated in recent years. Luther explained, “At first it was the peasants who drank to excess, then it spread to the citizens. In my time it was considered a great shame among the nobility. Now they are worse than the citizens and peasants.”<sup>5</sup> The problem had so worsened that even those who once were least likely to indulge were now succumbing to the vice. Luther lamented, “Some spark of sobriety may remain among young children, virgins, and women, though underneath one finds pigs among them too.”<sup>6</sup>

Second, the escalating profligacy of the people had thoroughly tarnished Germany's reputation. Luther complained, “This gluttony and swilling is inundating us like an ocean and among the Spaniards, Italians, and English it is reprehended. We are the laughingstock of all other countries.”<sup>7</sup> However, Luther's concern for the reputation of the gospel far surpassed any nationalistic pride. He explained, “We Christians ought to be examples,” yet even the Turks are far better models of moderation than German Christians.<sup>8</sup>

Third, this licentiousness had even become a badge of honor for some evangelicals. Sadly, “It is now becoming a custom even in evangelical cities to establish taprooms; a donkey goes in, pays a penny, and drinks the whole day long; and the

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<sup>4</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 292.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 296–97.

government does nothing about it.”<sup>9</sup> Luther sarcastically continued, “These taverns are necessary, of course, even a pious custom.”<sup>10</sup>

Fourth, the consequences of drunkenness are great. It carries social consequences, like increased poverty. “It is no wonder that all of you are beggars. How much money might not be saved!”<sup>11</sup> Drunkenness carries spiritual consequences, like impeded prayer. This is why Peter urged his readers to be “sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.”<sup>12</sup> Luther explained, “When a man is drunk his reason is buried, his tongue and all his members are incapable of praying; he is a drunken pig and the devil has devoured him. Then the devil is occupying his members.”<sup>13</sup>

However, the most lamentable consequence of drunkenness is its eternal cost. In short, it leads to damnation, a truth that Luther frequently repeated in this sermon. For instance, “If you are going to go beyond [drinking in moderation] and be a born pig and guzzle beer and wine, then . . . you must know that you cannot be saved;”<sup>14</sup> “Do not think that you are saved if you are a drunken pig day and night;”<sup>15</sup> and “God forbids [drunkenness] on pain of damnation and loss of the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>16</sup>

For these reasons and more, Luther felt compelled to address the growing social concern. The problem was not drinking *per se*, but drunkenness. Luther explained:

We would not forbid [alcohol entirely]; it is possible to tolerate a little elevation,

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<sup>9</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 295.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>12</sup>1 Peter 4:7

<sup>13</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 295.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 294.

when a man takes a drink or two too much after working hard and when he is feeling low. This must be called a frolic. But to sit day and night, pouring it in and pouring it out again, is piggish. This is not a human way of living, not to say Christian, but rather a pig's life.<sup>17</sup>

He continued, "Eating and drinking are not forbidden [in Scripture] but rather all food is a matter of freedom, even a modest drink for one's pleasure."<sup>18</sup> Luther carefully balanced a harsh stance against the sin of drunkenness, while maintaining a modicum of liberty to drink in moderation. He was careful not to conflate alcohol abuse with alcohol consumption.

Furthermore, the societal problem of drunkenness was not due to a lack of preaching on the topic. Luther exclaimed, "We preach and the Holy Scriptures teach us otherwise; but you want to evade what is taught."<sup>19</sup> He lamented, "Where one can find sermons which will stop the Germans from swilling I do not know."<sup>20</sup> However, Luther's response to the apparent failure of preaching to remedy the epidemic was not to give up the pulpit, but to continue to proclaim the Word of God.

If anything, Luther's resolve to preach the Word with tenacity had grown. He commanded his people: "If you have been a pig, then stop being one."<sup>21</sup> Repentance is possible. He reminded them that Augustine once said, "I have known many who were drunkards and then ceased being drunkards." Luther's hearers needed simply to hear the Word of God and obey. Nevertheless, putting off drunkenness was not enough. Peter urged them to be alert, sober, and moderate. In short, Christians need to be examples.

Luther concluded his sermon with verse eight: "Above all, keep loving one

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<sup>17</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 293.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 296.

another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”<sup>22</sup> “This could well be a sermon in itself,” Luther exclaimed.<sup>23</sup> Again, he recognized a clear link between the imperative to love and salvation. He explained,

If you want to be saved, you must possess the red dress which is here described. You have put on the vestment. You are white as snow [Isa. 1:18], pure from all sins. But you must wear this red dress and color now, and remember to love your neighbor. Moreover, it should be a fervent love, not a pale-red love, not the love which is easily provoked to revenge [1 Cor. 13:5]. It should be a strong color, a brown-red love, which is capable not only of doing good toward your neighbor but is also able to bear all malice from him [1 Cor. 13:4, 7]. For this is the way sins are covered, even a multitude, a heap, a sea, a forest of sins.<sup>24</sup>

Luther continued with, for the first time in the sermon, a clear explication of the gospel:

How does it do this? It does not mean my sin in the way the pope interprets this, i.e., whenever I love God and my neighbor then I blot out my sins. No. It is another’s love, namely, Christ’s love, which has covered my sins, as Peter says in chapter two. He bore them in his body on the cross and erased them completely [1 Peter 2:24]. This is said with regard to your sins, the sins you commit against me and I against you.<sup>25</sup>

Christ supplies the love that he requires, mediated to the Christian by grace through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Christian must love his neighbor. Luther elucidated this necessity with a slew of imperatives in the final words of his sermon. The pope and the Anabaptists may teach differently, but Luther’s preaching was from Christ. Therefore, the hearer must obey or forfeit his place in the kingdom of heaven.

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

The *inventio* of law in this sermon reveals a preponderance of the third use. Luther used the law as a bridle 4 times, as a mirror 15 times, and as a guide no fewer than 35 times. The result was an apparently harsh sermon that demanded Christian obedience

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<sup>22</sup>1 Peter 4:8

<sup>23</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 297.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

upon threat of hell. Nevertheless, Luther’s use of the law seemed compelled more by anguish than by anger. The pervasive and flagrant sins of his congregation were characteristic of lostness, driving Luther to a justifiable depth of concern.

The *dispositio* of law and gospel in this sermon is largely one-sided. Luther began with the law in its third use, urging his hearers to good conduct. He employed the second use to reveal the height of Germany’s sin, then the first use to threaten the imminent return of Christ. As the sermon continued, Luther delivered a revolving use of law to expose the sin in his congregation, restrain further sin with legal threats, and instruct them on Christian obedience.

What is striking is the considerable distance between the plethora of law and any semblance of a gospel indicative. In fact, Luther only explicitly featured such indicatives twice in the sermon, and they did not appear until the final words of the sermon. They were entirely absent from Luther’s discussion of drunkenness, and did not appear until he began to exegete Peter’s command to love in verse eight. Furthermore, these gospel indicatives did not conclude the sermon. The gospel did not get the final word. Even after reminding his hearers that the true love that covers sin is the love of Christ, he concluded with a purple patch of law to instruct the believer in love of neighbor.

Table 13. Law and gospel in 1 Peter 4:7-11

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	1	4	--	--
Sanctification	1	0	15	35
<i>Total</i>	2	4	15	35

Table 13 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>26</sup> The abundance of the third use is of particular significance here, as is the virtual absence of any gospel promises. Figure 15 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

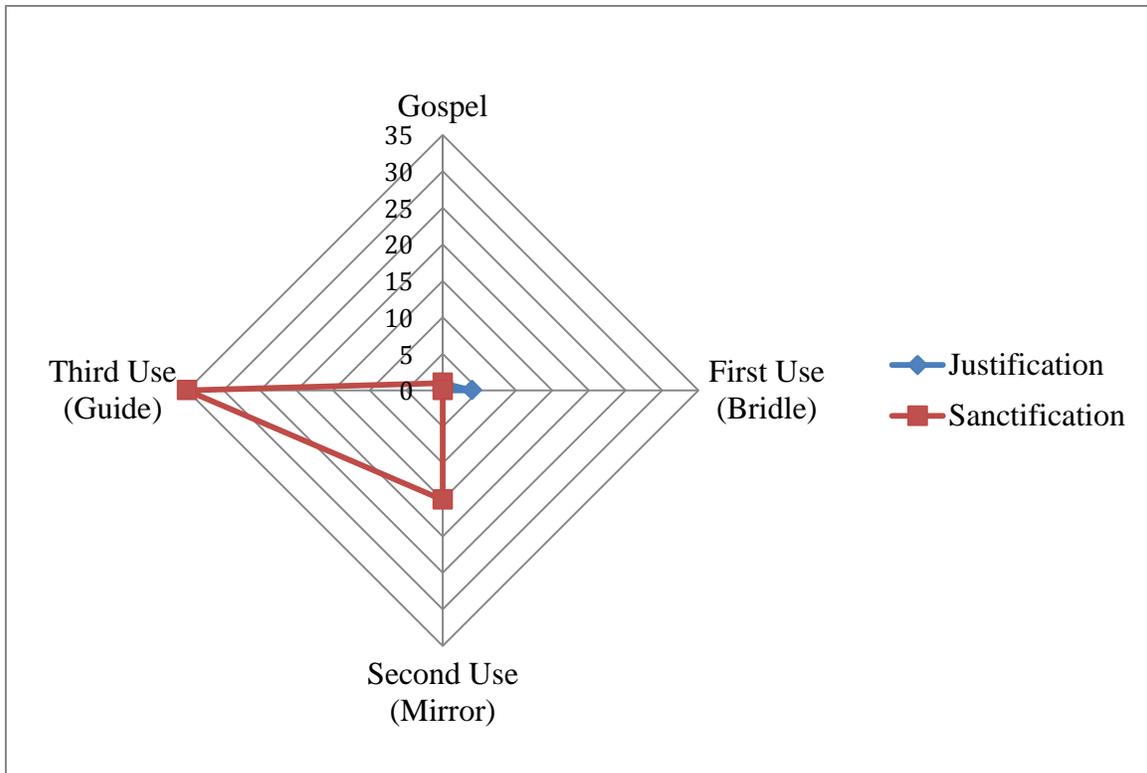


Figure 15. Law and gospel in 1 Peter 4:7-11

### Redemptive-Historical Analysis

It is hard to imagine a committed advocate of the redemptive-historical school reading this sermon with anything but disapprobation. Luther's words were a veritable cornucopia of law, with a word of gospel almost entirely absent. Even more perplexing is

<sup>26</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

the glowing reviews this sermon receives. John Doberstein exclaims, “This sermon . . . in which Luther deals head-on with a social question of his day, is remarkable for its *non-legalistic treatment* of the subject.”<sup>27</sup> Fred Meuser also remarks,

Although this sermon is strong, denunciatory, and even sarcastic in places, it is never legalistic. What he said about the Christian life in relation to alcoholic use was always an *outgrowth of the gospel*. His interest was never simply the negative objective of getting people to stop drinking. He did not resort to the so-called third use of the law. All of life, including the use or nonuse of alcohol, is to be an expression of the love of the neighbor as it flows out of the new life in Christ.<sup>28</sup>

Meuser’s claim that Luther did not resort to a third use is nearly impossible to defend.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, what is noteworthy is how both authors recognize the gospel context in which this sermon is set. However, viewing the imperatival tone of this sermon as an “outgrowth of the gospel” requires a look beyond this sermon alone to Luther’s overall pulpit ministry. Such an approach is essentially off-limits from the redemptive-historical perspective.

This sermon is a textbook example of a “Deadly Be” sermon. Although exemplarism is absent, prescriptive and exhortative elements are numerous. Luther urged his hearers to discipline themselves in self-control concerning drink: “Do not make a pig of yourself; remain a human being. If you are a human being, then keep your human self-control.”<sup>30</sup> However, he did not remind his hearers to pursue this self-control with the motivating power of grace. On the contrary, a narrow reading of this particular sermon would almost suggest that self-control is entirely a human pursuit. In his many prescriptions—to put off drunkenness, train children, be an example to nonbelievers, embrace moderation, avoid anger, reject envy, love one’s neighbor, and more—Luther

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<sup>27</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 291. Emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup>Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 69. Emphasis added.

<sup>29</sup>See appendix 1.

<sup>30</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 296.

made virtually no effort to remind hearers that obedience does not merit God's favor. On the contrary, he seemed to do the opposite by threatening his hearers with damnation if they failed to obey.

### **Revelation 12:7-12**

Luther's sermon on Revelation 12:7-12 represents Luther's treatment of *Apocalyptic* literature.<sup>31</sup> It also is the only sermon included based on the Apostle John's writings. Furthermore, it is the only exposition included from 1544. The sermon is based on John's vision of Satan's fall:

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!” (Rev 12:7-12).

### **Contextual Analysis**

Luther's opinions on the book of Revelation are well attested. In his 1522 edition of German New Testament, he questioned its canonicity. His feelings towards the book likely influenced his decision nearly to avoid it entirely in the pulpit. However, in his 1530 preface to Revelation, he tempered his position. He developed an appreciation for Revelation since it depicted “through and beyond all plagues, beasts, and evil angels, Christ is nonetheless with his saints, and wins the final victory.”<sup>32</sup> It is likely not a

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<sup>31</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 58, *Sermons V*, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2010), 171–86. Also, WA, 49: 570-87.

<sup>32</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 411.

coincidence that all three of his sermons on Revelation came after his position softened. Luther preached this sermon, his final exposition from Revelation, in Wittenberg on September 29, 1544 during the Festival of St. Michael and All Angels. Luther's usual custom was to preach Matthew 18:1-11, the appointed text from the lectionary. However, on this occasion he opted instead to preach from Revelation 12:7-12.

### **Textual Analysis**

Luther began by distinguishing between two kinds of angels in Scripture. "The first are those that are called holy, heavenly spirits, without flesh and blood."<sup>33</sup> These angels are what most Christians would think of when hearing the term. They are messengers of God, heavenly beings who frequently arrive in biblical narratives, such as Gabriel's appearance before Mary. However, there is another type of angel in Scriptures, "those with flesh and blood, including Christ Himself, God's Son, with whom [Scripture] is primarily concerned."<sup>34</sup> Luther saw the latter option, centering on Christ, as the emphasis of this passage.

Just as there are two types of angels in Scripture, there are two kingdoms in view when Scripture refers to the kingdom of heaven. The first kingdom is the kingdom of the Father, and is the eternal state. This kingdom is presently visible to angels and is the future home for Christians. The second kingdom is the kingdom of Christ, which is only visible to the eyes of faith. This kingdom "we possess here only in hearing and faith."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, these two kingdoms are really one:

In one, [Christ] governs in this life, drawing a veil in front of our eyes so that we cannot see Him, but rather must believe. In the other, we will no longer believe, but rather see with our eyes. Yet it is all, ultimately, one and the same thing. What we now preach and believe, we will then behold face-to-face. . . . You are, without

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<sup>33</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 173.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 175.

doubt, in heaven already, and nothing is lacking, except that you are waiting until He comes to you visibly.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, the heavenly battle that John describes in this text is really an earthly battle. Luther explained, “This battle must be understood not as a battle of the spirits in heaven, but rather as the battle of Christians who belong to Christ’s kingdom through faith.”<sup>37</sup> This battle is primarily a battle for truth and the Word of God, a war “between pure and false teachers and preachers—a struggle that never ceases, save that sometimes it is greater and more violent, sometimes less.”<sup>38</sup>

The great dragon in this battle is none but Satan himself. However, the archangel Michael is not a created being, as some would suppose, but a title for Christ. This must be so, for the name signifies “if it is to be translated correctly, nothing other than ‘equal to God.’ That is a name that is appropriate for no one except . . . the Son of God.”<sup>39</sup> Christopher Brown remarks that this christocentric interpretation of “Michael” as a title for Christ is “unusual but not unprecedented in patristic and medieval exegesis.”<sup>40</sup>

This battle between Christ, the true “Michael,” and the Dragon will rage on until Jesus returns. Therefore, Christians can never rest on this earth. Luther exhorted his hearers, “We who bear God’s Word should take heart, expecting no peace here, but rather remembering that we are soldiers who must be on the battlefield. Indeed, we must always stand armed for battle, since when one war stops, another one immediately begins.”<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Christians can take heart because Christ is with his people in the heat of battle.

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<sup>36</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 175–76.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 178–79.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 180.

The Christian's primary weapon against the Enemy is "the word of their testimony."<sup>42</sup> Luther explained,

They cannot pierce him with a spear or a sword. . . . Thus, if you want to be a good soldier of Christ, you must arm yourself with courage and good cheer and slash and shoot at the devil with God's Word and your confession, bringing his lies and deceptions to nothing and undermining his kingdom.<sup>43</sup>

Again, the Christian can take comfort in the presence of heavenly angels who battle alongside them, but they must never forget that "the work of this battle against the devil and his temptation is entrusted to us human beings (since we are Christians)."<sup>44</sup>

The central battlefield in this war against the Dragon is the Christian pulpit. The Devil knows that if he can corrupt preachers and teachers so the gospel is not heard, "the flock, too, will soon fall away."<sup>45</sup> This is why heresies like Arianism and others are so deadly to the church. Furthermore, this explains the importance of clear and frequent explanation of true doctrine from the pulpit. The preacher can never assume that such heresies are too distant from his congregation to be any real danger. Luther warned,

Therefore, do not think that the devil is only in hell or over in Babylon or only in Turkey or in Rome with the pope and his cardinals and bishops. These he does not need to tempt with his teaching, for he has already caught them in his lies; . . . But here he wages war and does battle in order to tear us down as well.<sup>46</sup>

Despite this unceasing war with Satan, Christians should not lose heart. In a particularly gospel-drenched conclusion, Luther encouraged his hearers with a reminder of Christ's presence.

What [else] do I need, if I possess God's Son? What more could He do for me or how could He come closer to me than by becoming my flesh and blood, by being so near to me now that He dwells with me, feeds me, baptizes me, exhorts me, rebukes

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<sup>42</sup>Revelation 12:11

<sup>43</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 181.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 183.

me? Although we cannot see each other, nonetheless I hear about Him through His Word, that He is true God and man, who cleanses me of sins through His baptism, feeds me with His flesh and blood, and frees me from sins through His Absolution. I hear this, and it comes to me through the ears, and through the ears into the heart, so that it would not be possible for it to come any closer.<sup>47</sup>

This promise should embolden the war-weary Christian to rejoice. Christ has already won the victory. Furthermore, his presence with his people should strengthen them to be willing to lay down their lives for the spread of his gospel.

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

Luther's *inventio* in this sermon once again predominantly featured the law in its third use. He used the law in its first use twice, both instances to warn his hearers about the dangers of falling away. He employed the second use 5 times, primarily to explicate the failure of God's people to respond joyfully to the good news of the gospel. Conversely, he featured the third use 19 times. Several of these instances highlighted the initial imperative: to be a Christian one must believe. However, the bulk of Luther's imperatives involved the subsequent imperative, namely that Christians must proceed in sanctification through obedience. This is particularly true in relation to spiritual warfare. Christians should "take heart," "stand armed for battle," "not relax or grow slack," "slash and shoot at the devil," "stand," "be watchful and alert," "look out and watch," "prepare," "fight," "rejoice," "teach," "lay down their lives," "suffer," "stand fast," and "persevere."

Luther's *dispositio* of law and gospel in this sermon is slightly more robust than what has come before in this chapter. He began by setting a gospel framework, since the entire Scriptures testify of Christ and his gospel. Nevertheless, too many Christians were not enamored with this reality. Here Luther employed the law in its second use to reveal the flaws of man. He then utilized the third use to urge hearers to believe this gospel. Sandwiched throughout the remainder of the sermon are countless references to gospel promises. Heaven is a guarantee because of the gospel; therefore, Christians have

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<sup>47</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 183.

all they need.<sup>48</sup> Christ died for his church both saving and sanctifying them through the Holy Spirit.<sup>49</sup> Jesus came to earth to redeem his people.<sup>50</sup> He battles alongside them,<sup>51</sup> He gathers and warns his soldiers.<sup>52</sup> His blood defeats the Dragon.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the Christian has no need to be afraid.<sup>54</sup>

Despite a final exhortation to stand fast in the midst of persecution, Luther allowed gospel, not law, to have the final word:

From the beginning, God promised the Church that Christ would trample the serpent's head until he ceased to pierce His heel [Gen. 3:15]. The entire Scriptures tell of this, and everything in them has to do with this Son of God, who became man for us and spilled His blood that He might trample the devil with his infernal army and weapons of sin, death, and hell under our feet and take us, at His joyous coming, out of the battle of faith to the eternal safety and glory of seeing.<sup>55</sup>

Yes, the battle rages on. Yes, Christians must hold fast until the final victory.

Nevertheless, in the end the glorious gospel will prevail.

Table 14. Law and gospel in Revelation 12:7-12

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	9	2	1	2
Sanctification	7	--	4	17
<i>Total</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>19</i>

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<sup>48</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 175.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 180, 181, 182, 183.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

Table 14 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>56</sup> Once again, this sermon features an abundance of the law in its third use. Equally noteworthy is the noticeable slant towards imperatives related to sanctification. Figure 16 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

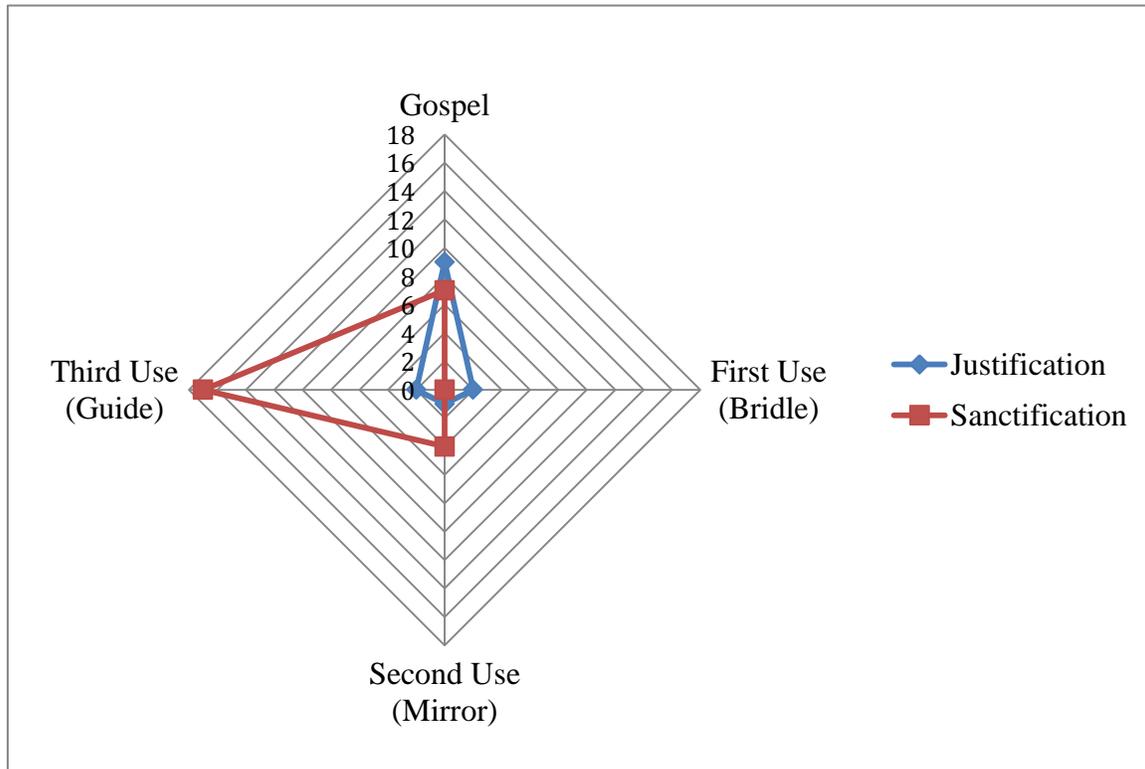


Figure 16. Law and gospel in Revelation 12:7-12

### Redemptive-Historical Analysis

Although most RH theorists would likely balk at Luther’s interpretation of Michael as a title for Christ, most would be pleased with the Christ-centeredness of this sermon. Nevertheless, Luther’s imperatives still fail the test of redemptive-historical

<sup>56</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

legitimacy. Although the promises of the gospel are replete throughout the sermon, they were not employed to directly to qualify the imperatives. None of the aforementioned commands directly aligned with grace as a motivator. Not once did Luther remind his hearers that conformity could not merit God's favor. Nor did he labor to untether their assurance from their obedience. The result was a deadly exhortative sermon, ironically permeated with the gospel.

### **Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14**

Luther's 1545 sermon based on prophecies from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 represents Luther's treatment of *Prophetic* literature.<sup>57</sup> The sermon is rooted in Paul's use of prophetic literature from his epistle to the Corinthians:

When this corruptible is clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal is clothed with immortality, then the saying that is written will take place: Death has been swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! (1 Cor 15:54-57).

In this passage, Paul quotes twice from Old Testament prophecy: "He will destroy death forever" (Isa 25:8), and "Death, where are your barbs? Sheol, where is your sting?" (Hos 13:14). Luther's sermon is based on these two Old Testament quotations.

### **Contextual Analysis**

The doctrine of the resurrection was essential to Luther's theology. While many know Luther as a "theologian of the cross," it is essential to understand that his theology inextricably linked the cross to the reality of the resurrection. A look at the cross was always a look forward to the resurrection. Nevertheless, despite the importance of this doctrine many of the common people did not sufficiently understand it. Therefore, in 1544 the Castle Church reorganized the lectionary for the Sundays after Easter to allow

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<sup>57</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 58: 148–60. Also, *WA*, 49: 761-80.

greater opportunity for teaching on the resurrection. Rather than the traditional readings from James, “It would be better,” Luther explained, “to give this season its due and, between Easter and Pentecost, for the instruction and comfort of the people, to give a thorough exposition of the article concerning both Christ’s resurrection and our own.”<sup>58</sup>

It was during this change that Luther’s sermon on Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 appeared. Although it appeared in the lectionary as an exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, its content is almost exclusively based on Paul’s quotations from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:4. This reality led Christopher Brown to refer to the sermon as “a popular presentation of much of the substance of Luther’s 1545 Latin commentary on Hosea 13.”<sup>59</sup>

### **Textual Analysis**

Luther’s sermon is essentially an exposition of Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:4, seen from Paul’s perspective in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57. Luther began by unpacking the promise from Isaiah: “He will swallow up death forever.” Luther explained, “Death will be no more, but there will be only life.”<sup>60</sup> This is not due to happenstance, but “the Lord of hosts will accomplish this, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ, Mary’s Son, true God, praised eternally.”<sup>61</sup> God fulfills this promise whenever a sinner believes the gospel, but it will receive its ultimate fulfillment when Christ returns.

Luther continued by discussing the word “victory.” Paul interprets the Hebrew word *Lanaezach* in Isaiah 25 as “victory.” Luther understood here two victories. The first is the present victory of death, which reigns over the entire world. The second is the ultimate victory of life, which in Christ is victorious over death. With rhetorical flourish,

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<sup>58</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 36, *Word and Sacrament II*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and Abdel R. Wentz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 91.

<sup>59</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 95.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

Luther exclaimed,

Here, death lives, rules, reigns, triumphs, and sings: "I have prevailed! I have prevailed! I, death, am king and victor over all the world. I have power and authority over everything that lives on earth. I strike dead and slay all men: young, old, rich, poor, high, lowly noble, common. Fie to the one who resists me!" But death will soon sing himself hoarse and to death. Soon he will be forbidden to sing this cantata. For on Easter another song was begun that sings: "Christ is arisen / From the grave's dark prison. / So let our joy rise full and free; / Christ our comfort true shall be." Death, where is your victory now? Where now do you have the One who lay in the grave and whom you killed on the cross?<sup>62</sup>

Next Luther examined the promise from Hosea: "O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?" Luther remarked, "St. Paul now says, on the basis of the prophet Hosea, that the sting or spear of death shall be removed. Death shall be disarmed through Christ's resurrection so that it no longer possesses sting or spear."<sup>63</sup> That sting, according to Paul is sin.<sup>64</sup>

Sin is the sting of death because "if there were no sin, death would have no right or power over us; it would have no sword or spear with which it could slay us."<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, many people do not yet feel the sting of their sin. Their sin is ever-present, but coarseness or ignorance has dimmed their perception. "They go their way in security and do not feel what sin and death are until death has devoured and swallowed them completely."<sup>66</sup>

Only the law can awaken sleepy sinners to the deadly sting of their sin. Thus, Paul says, "the power of sin is the law."<sup>67</sup> Luther explained,

Death would be unable to overcome us if sin did not come alive, gnaw, and stab in

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<sup>62</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 153.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>64</sup>1 Cor 15:56

<sup>65</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 156.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>67</sup>1 Cor 15:56

the conscience. But sin would not come alive, but go on sleeping, if there were no Law to declare us guilty, accuse us, and say: "You do not believe and trust God. You do not fear God. You are secure and godless." Or, again: "You have done such and such." That is how the law awakens sin in us: a man looks at the Law and finds that he has not kept it.<sup>68</sup>

Luther reminded his hearers that the law's function as "the power of sin" is not due to its deficiency. Nay, the law is holy and good. The fault lies in the sinfulness of man's heart. The law merely serves to awaken the slumbering sinner to the reality of his sin, and his desperate need for Christ. Jesus did not abolish the law, but relieved it of its condemning force.

The beauty of the gospel is Christ's ability to strip death of its sting and sin of its power. Death's sting is gone because Christ has risen. Jesus paid sin's penalty on the cross for all who believe, removing its power to condemn. He has "fulfilled the Law perfectly and entirely and stopped its mouth so that it must stop accusing and condemning us."<sup>69</sup>

The practical implications of these realities for the Christian are twofold. First, the redeemed can withstand *Anfechtung* by believing the truth of the gospel. "If the Law attacks us and says, 'You have done such and such,' and wants to bring us into death through sin, then we are to cling to Christ."<sup>70</sup> Second, the believer's natural response to the resurrecting power of the gospel should be unmatched gratitude. Luther concluded, "Let us thank Him from the bottom of our hearts, here on earth and there in heaven, for such surpassing grace and favor, granted to us in Christ. Amen."<sup>71</sup>

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

Luther's *inventio* in this sermon was an impassioned presentation of the

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<sup>68</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 158.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 160.

gospel. From beginning to end, Luther saturated his sermon with promises of the resurrecting power of Christ: all Christians will rise;<sup>72</sup> Christ gives believers his Spirit;<sup>73</sup> in Jesus all believers will ascend into heaven;<sup>74</sup> all Christ accomplished was for the sake of the redeemed;<sup>75</sup> death will be defeated;<sup>76</sup> and Christians are free from the condemning power of the law.<sup>77</sup>

Table 15. Law and gospel in Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	17	--	2	2
Sanctification	2	--	1	7
<i>Total</i>	<i>19</i>	--	3	9

Nevertheless, the sermon was not *exclusively* a gospel treatise. Although its appearance was minimal, Luther did utilize the law occasionally. He presented the law in its second use 3 times, mostly to reveal the ignorance of sinners. He employed the law in its third use 9 times, each time in direct connection to the gospel. Four times Luther told his hearers to believe the gospel.<sup>78</sup> Twice he commanded them to thank God and praise him for this gospel.<sup>79</sup> Twice he urged his hearers to pursue sufficient gospel depth: "we

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<sup>72</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 148-49, 154.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 151-53, 155, 160.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 159-60.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 149-50, 159.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 154, 160.

should . . . ground ourselves firmly upon it"<sup>80</sup> and "we are to cling to Christ."<sup>81</sup>

Luther's *dispositio* of law and gospel decidedly centers on the gospel. Even when he issued a legal imperative, he usually presented it as an implication of the explicated gospel. Hence, the word "therefore" often appeared before imperatives in this sermon. Luther began with a triumphant indicative: "God's Son became man in order to blot out sin and redeem from death."<sup>82</sup> He concluded with an ecstatic imperative: "Let us thank Him from the bottom of our hearts, here on earth and there in heaven, for such surpassing grace and favor, granted to us in Christ. Amen."<sup>83</sup>

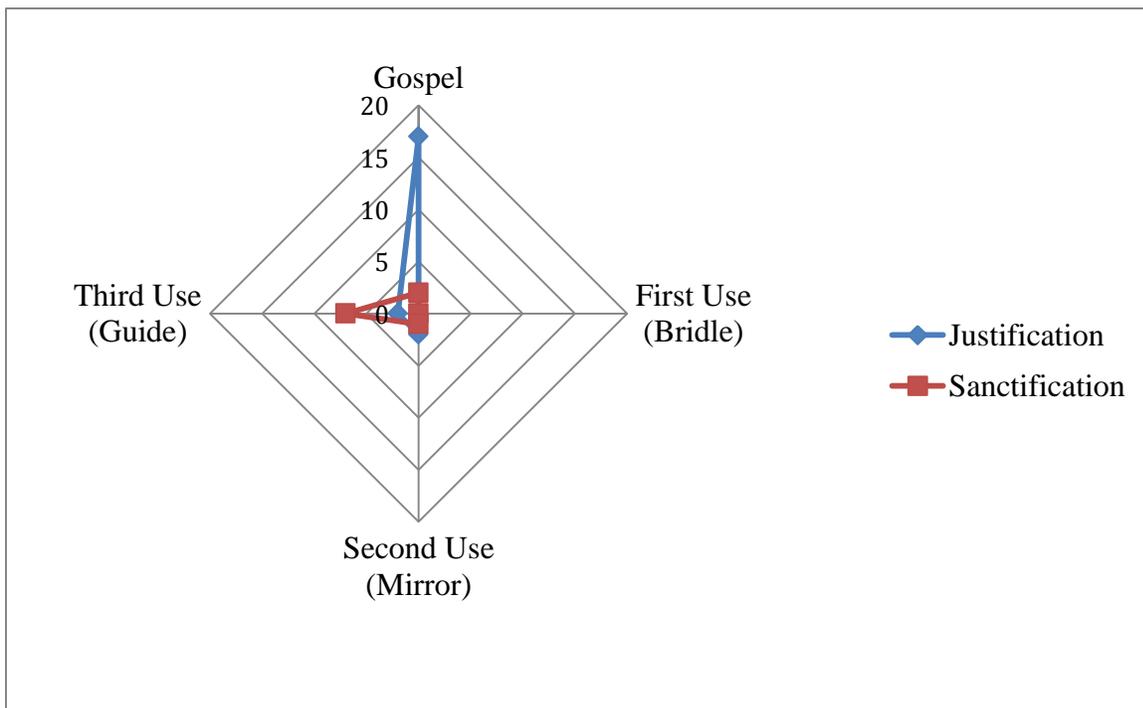


Figure 17. Law and gospel in Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14

<sup>80</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 154.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 160.

Table 15 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>84</sup> Of particular importance here is the total absence of the law in its first use. Furthermore, the law is significantly downplayed in this sermon, which contains a wealth of gospel promises concerning justification. Figure 17 above offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

### **Redemptive-Historical Analysis**

This exposition of two powerful Old Testament promises passes the test for redemptive-historical legitimacy with excellence. Luther analyzed these promises in light of the redemptive storyline and their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. He did not shy away from imperatives, but with precision connected each word of command to a word of promise. In fact, the sermon was emphatically Christ-centered; little about what man must do and much about what Christ has done. Moreover, Luther avoided any semblance of nonredemptive elements.

Luther's unequivocal conformity to RH criteria in this particular sermon carries significant import. First, it establishes the fact that satisfying something like the modern redemptive-historical criteria was not beyond the homiletical skill of the reformer. He was not beneath preaching such sermons, nor was he unable to accomplish the feat. Second, it reveals a helpful principle: a sermon likely *should* conform to the radical measures of the RH school when the text itself is radically gospel-soaked and Christ-centered. To turn a sermon on a gospel-saturated text into a fiery exposition of law would be a categorical mistake. Nevertheless, one wonders if redemptive-historical advocates would concede that the reverse might also be true.

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<sup>84</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

### Hebrews 13:4

Luther's 1545 sermon on Hebrews 13:4 is included as a representation of the preacher's homiletical handling of the epistle.<sup>85</sup> It also is noteworthy as a highly relevant exposition of the Christian understanding of marriage. The sermon is based on the admonition from Hebrews: "Let marriage be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous" (Heb 13:4).

### Contextual Analysis

Sexual morals in Wittenberg occasionally prompted Luther's concern. Lewd dancing was all too common among the young people. Prostitution was frequently a problem. At one point Luther threatened to name a list of adulterers from the pulpit and ban them from the Lord's Supper.<sup>86</sup> He refused to keep silent when Hans von Metzsch, the city governor, persisted in fornication.<sup>87</sup>

By summer 1545, the promiscuity was so great that Luther threatened to leave. "What are we preaching?" he lamented. "It would be better if we would quit. . . . It seems that everything is lost."<sup>88</sup> Then, on July 25, Luther made good on his threats. Three days later, he wrote to his wife, "I should like to arrange not to have to go back to Wittenberg. . . . Away with this Sodom!"<sup>89</sup> Brecht explains the gravity of the situation:

It was always clear to him that there could never be a sinless community on earth, but he expected a Christian city to take more energetic action against abuses than it actually did. This proved to be difficult in the context of a people's church (*Volkskirche*). The situations in Wittenberg were definitely not a special case, but rather typical. We also cannot pass off the Wittenberg preacher's sufferings over this as the grumpiness of an old man. Evangelical preaching certainly was not

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<sup>85</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 357–67.

<sup>86</sup>Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 436.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup>Brecht, *Luther: 1532-1546*, 262.

<sup>89</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 357.

without results, but there were limits in changing the social conditions of broad classes in a Christian way because of egoism, self-interest, and human weakness.<sup>90</sup>

Three weeks after vacating his preaching post, Luther returned to Wittenberg. In many ways, his return was as sudden and surprising as his departure. Moreover, it was during this three-week absence that the frustrated preacher delivered his sermon on marriage from Hebrews 13:4. He travelled to nearby Merseburg at the request of Prince Georg of Anhalt to preach the wedding sermon for Sigismund von Lindenau. The result is a powerful sermon on the glory of marriage that is just as relevant today.

### **Textual Analysis**

“This is a sermon concerning the holy estate of matrimony which is highly necessary, especially among Christians.”<sup>91</sup> Thus, Luther began a powerful and relevant sermon on the institution of marriage. Luther deemed this sermon necessary for two reasons. First, Christians must heed the Scripture’s admonishment to “let the marriage bed be undefiled.” This was necessary because many “go on living so casually from day to day, like the heathen and dumb brutes who . . . simply go on interbreeding and cohabiting promiscuously. No, among Christians, it must not be so.”<sup>92</sup> The fact that Luther deemed it important to forbid Christians from such lasciviousness implies a growing practice in Wittenberg.

Second, this topic was necessary because of rampant false teaching regarding marriage. Luther explained, “This estate should not be condemned and rejected as something foul and unclean, as the pope and his followers do.”<sup>93</sup> Luther listed several reasons to esteem marriage: it is the oldest created institution, it is God’s perfect intent

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<sup>90</sup>Brecht, *Luther: 1532-1546*, 264.

<sup>91</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 357.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 359.

for all people, it brings children into the world, it is the truest expression of masculinity and femininity, and it is pure and honorable in God's sight. Christians should highly esteem marriage because God esteems marriage.

Luther offered three types of individuals who must respond to the goodness of marriage. First, those who had taken vows of chastity should abandon those vows. After all, they were unable to keep them anyway: "Pigsties are nasty, dirty places, but they are clean and pure compared with the cloisters."<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, they should abandon their vows since God did not desire them. After all, such vows are contrary to his will. Rather, their chastity vows appeal only to "the miserable devil in hell and his mother."<sup>95</sup>

Second, those who had dishonored marriage through sexual sin should repent. Luther explained, "If for a time you have lived outside of this state in concubinage and led a life of fornication, ah, then stop it and repent, enter into marriage and henceforth live a married and godly life. Then you will be doing the right and Christian thing."<sup>96</sup>

Third, those who were currently married should thank God for marriage. They should ignore the lies of the pope, designed to shame them. God esteems their marriage. Furthermore, the married must maintain pure marriages by resisting temptation and raising any children from their union in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

The third use of the law appeared in this sermon almost twice as much as the other two uses combined. This *inventio* included 5 instances of the first use, 10 of the second, and 28 of the third. With the first use, Luther reminded his hearers that judgment was imminent for whoremongers and those who forbade marriage. This judgment is not

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<sup>94</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 360.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, 364.

restricted to Judgment Day, but includes premature deaths and other calamities. With the second use, Luther exposed the filthiness of fornication and the sinful folly of chastity vows. The slew of imperatives in the third use addressed three primary groups: the sexual sinners, the faithfully married, and the slanderers of marriage. Those engaged in sexual sin like fornication and adultery must abandon their sin.<sup>97</sup> Be they unmarried, they must marry.<sup>98</sup> The married must remain pure in marriage,<sup>99</sup> thank God for it,<sup>100</sup> and raise their children honorably.<sup>101</sup> Those who condemned marriage must desist<sup>102</sup> and should esteem marriage as a precious gift from God.<sup>103</sup>

Luther's *dispositio* of law and gospel in this sermon is hardly noteworthy. In fact, the sermon is virtually empty of any redemptive components. At the outset, he explicitly noted this as a sermon that Christians should hear. His audience would certainly have interpreted his words in light of the gospel context of his ministry. Nevertheless, he did not explicitly mention or allude to the gospel in this sermon.

Table 16 below quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>104</sup> Of particular importance here is the drastic shift towards the law. The shift is most noticeable in the preponderance of the third use. Figure 18 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon. Luther does offer occasional

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<sup>97</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 358-59.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, 359, 361, 364.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, 359, 362-66.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 361, 365-67.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 359, 363, 366.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 359-60, 365.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 359-60, 365.

<sup>104</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

gospel promises that seem to offset the legal imperatives, but the reality is these are ambiguous, disconnected gospel indicatives with no clear connection to the legal imperatives at hand.

Table 16. Law and gospel in Hebrews 13:4

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	--	4	2	--
Sanctification	9	1	8	28
<i>Total</i>	9	5	10	28

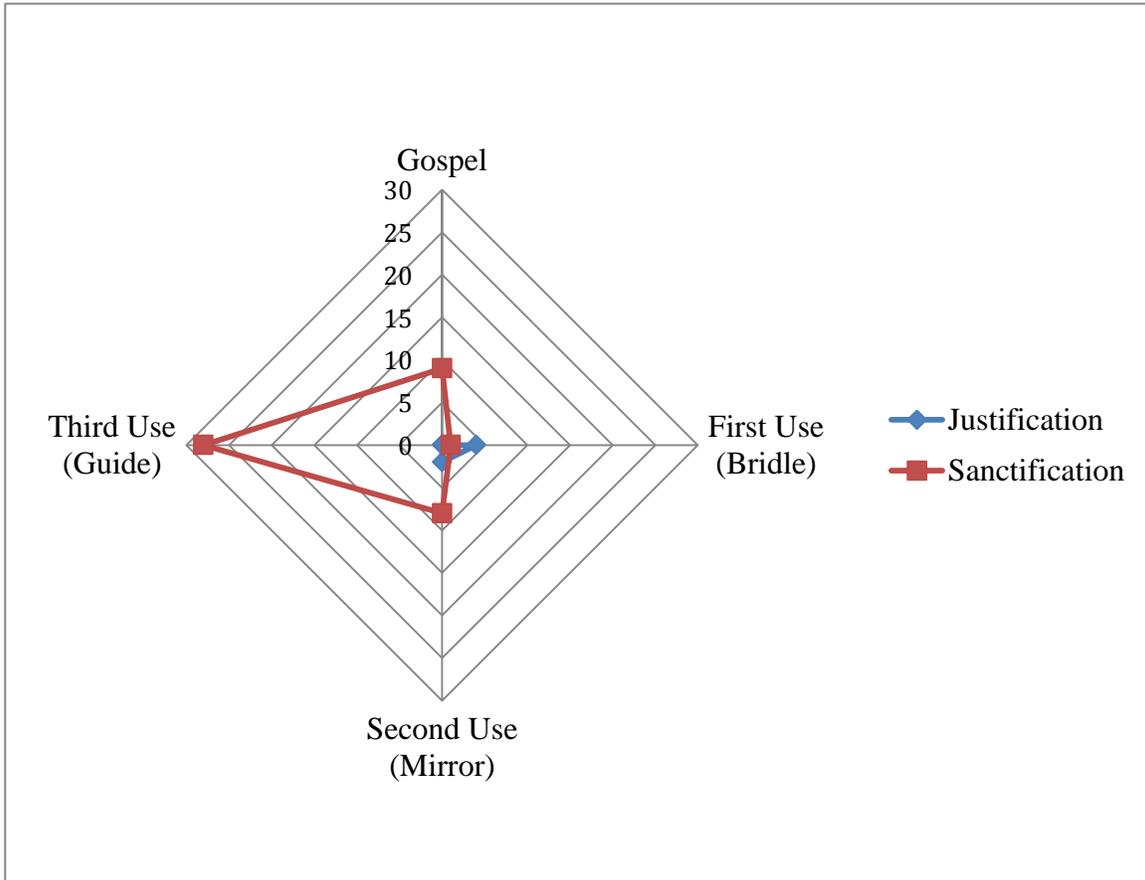


Figure 18. Law and gospel in Hebrews 13:4

## Redemptive-Historical Analysis

Perhaps more than any other, this sermon is indicative of a “Be good” message. Not once did Luther draw his many imperatives from an explicit articulation of the gospel, nor did he qualify them by gospel indicatives. Not once did he mention grace as the motivation for obedience. Several examples are particularly telling. In the above example, Luther instructed adulterers and fornicators to repent. He issued four clear imperatives: fornicators must “stop,” “repent,” “enter into marriage,” and “live a married and godly life.”<sup>105</sup> He did not remind his hearers that their obedience would not merit God’s favor, nor did he compel them to respond in light of the gospel. Instead, he simply told them that the one who responded in this way “will be doing the right and Christian thing.”<sup>106</sup>

Another example is even more condemning, in which Luther drew a straight line from obedience to blessing:

Therefore we also lead brides and grooms to the church, in order that they may publicly confess that they are entering into the holy estate of matrimony in accord with God’s ordinance, that they do not intend to live in concubinage, and they are blessed, and they have no doubt that they are blessed by God. But they must take care that they remain blessed and lead their married life as married persons should, God-fearingly, purely, and unblemished, then they will remain blessed.<sup>107</sup>

First, Luther explicitly connected the obedience of repentance and marriage with divine blessing. He did not remind them that Christ mediated this blessing or ultimately purchased it at the cross. Furthermore, he urged his hearers to remain pure in their marriage for in so doing they would not forfeit the blessing of God. It is difficult to imagine how this Christ-centered giant can escape such statements without enduring accusations of legalistic sub-Christian (or even anti-Christian) preaching.

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<sup>105</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 360, 364.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 363-64.

## Acts 9:1-19

Luther's 1546 sermon on Acts 9:1-19 represents Luther's treatment of *Narrative* literature.<sup>108</sup> It also is the only sermon included based on the Luke's writings. The sermon is based on Luke's recounting of Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus. Here Luther uses Paul's conversion "as an example of grace conveyed to the most serious of sinners through Christ's Word—in contrast to the pope and monks who reject the Word and refuse to turn from their ways."<sup>109</sup>

### Contextual Analysis

Just before Christmas in 1545, Luther received a summons to settle a dispute in Eisleben between two counts from his childhood town of Mansfield. Shortly thereafter, he departed with Melancthon, only to return to Wittenberg due to Philip's illness. They rescheduled the talks for January 25, 1546. On January 23, he departed once again for Mansfield with his three sons. In a letter to Katherine, he commented about the beer at various stops and "joked that he was not tempted by beautiful women en route, which evidently was a signal to her that he was too weak to be tempted by anything or anyone."<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, he was not too weak to preach. On Tuesday, January 26, still on his way to Eisleben, Luther preached a sermon in nearby Halle on the conversion of St. Paul.

### Textual Analysis

Luther began his sermon on Paul's conversion with a lengthy (and apparently unplanned) excursus on the follies of Catholic relics. His presence in Halle, with her

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<sup>108</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 58: 370–84. Also, *WA*, 51:136-48.

<sup>109</sup>Quotation from Christopher Brown, *LW*, 58, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown: 353.

<sup>110</sup>Martin Marty, *Martin Luther* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 182–83.

pesky monks and their cloisters, likely agitated Luther, compelling him to decry their blasphemous system of works righteousness and relic worship. These relics allegedly included the heads of saints Paul and Peter, although Luther insisted they were likely forgeries, designed to make fools of the simple.

The value of these fool's relics paled in comparison to "the living, true, and genuine relic . . . the dear Word of God."<sup>111</sup> By studying the Word of God the Christian has access to Peter and Paul themselves, something far better than a phony relic. In frustration, Luther urged the parishioners in Halle to put an end to the lies and blasphemy of the peddlers of these relics, be they monk or cardinal. Nevertheless, Luther's intent was not to focus on the errors of Rome, but to explain the conversion of St. Paul.

Prior to his conversion, Paul was a deplorable sinner. Indeed, his sins "are not minor sins, but rather exceedingly great ones."<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, his transgressions stand in stark contrast to the blasphemy of the pope, cardinals and monks. Paul persecuted the church in ignorance. Rome knew better, but still sought "to make monkeys and fools of the people."<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, unlike the "godless villains" of Rome, Paul actually repented when confronted with the truths of the gospel.

Luther's creative retelling of Christ's encounter with Saul is a beautiful depiction of the power of the gospel and the reformer's brilliance in the pulpit:

Christ here is saying: "did you hear that, Paul? The whole world is wavering in darkness and error and does not know me. But you're to call them and lead them from darkness into light, from the devil's kingdom into the kingdom of God, from death to life." "Yes, but how?" [Paul asks.] "By what means am I to accomplish this?" "Through the Word, which you, Paul, have now heard from Me in this sermon, namely, that you should preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in My name. And whoever believes in Me (that I am the true Son of God) is righteous before God and will receive eternal life." . . . "That is what you, Paul, are to preach, and whoever hears, accepts, and believes this preaching henceforth receives and

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<sup>111</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 373.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 378.

shall have the forgiveness of all his sins.” “Yes, [but] how?” “Through faith in Me, in Me,” says Christ.<sup>114</sup>

This gospel, not the lies of the papacy, brings hope to the masses. The same gospel that rescued Saul can rescue the sinner today. This gospel is a gift of pure grace; the sinner needs only to receive it. Yes, good works are a proper response to this gospel, but they can never earn it. The good works that should occupy the Christian are legion, but they are far too weak to wash away his sins. Only the blood of Christ will suffice.

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

Eighteen times Luther employed the third use, compared to only once for each of the first two uses. Luther’s imperatives largely centered on the primacy of the Word of God. Scripture must be read, heard, believed, preached, clung to, and esteemed. Furthermore, the residents of Hall should drive the monks out of town, keep watch, reject false doctrine, abandon works righteousness, and pursue good works.

Also noteworthy in Luther’s *inventio* is his excoriating rebuke of the papacy. The pope is “wretched,” “coarse, unlearned, and inept.” The monks are “lousy,” “foolish,” leprous,” “mangy,” “wretched,” “apes,” “filthy villains,” “coarse asses,” and “scum.” They tell “fat lies, as fat as big sacks stuffed full of hops or wool.”<sup>115</sup> The cardinal is “accursed” and a “godless villain.” In sum, Rome tells “fictitious, diabolical lies and dreams, and they burn and roast, persecute and punish with the most outrageous violence all who speak out against them.”<sup>116</sup>

Luther’s *dispositio* in this sermon is unique for its clear law-gospel dialectic, especially in its conclusion. After an extended presentation of the law in its second use to reveal the salvific impotency of even the most devoted and sacrificial works, he informed

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<sup>114</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 381-82.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 379.

his hearers that if they desired salvation, it would only be "out of pure grace and mercy through faith in Christ."<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, the hearer must respond to this gospel. Luther commanded his hearers to abandon their good works, listen to the Word of God, and receive it. Only then will they receive salvation. Once again, Luther reminded his hearers of the gospel truth that forgiveness is free.

Table 17. Law and gospel in Acts 9:1-19

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	12	--	1	4
Sanctification	1	1	--	14
<i>Total</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>18</i>

Nevertheless, the Christian must perform good works. The law is still necessary to instruct the believer in "good works continually."<sup>118</sup> Luther was then quick to qualify this statement: "However, we cannot earn the forgiveness of sins thereby."<sup>119</sup> Such power belongs to the blood of Christ alone. Lest the hearer forget the importance of good works, Luther issued a slew of practical imperatives to remind them "good works toward our neighbors should follow from faith."<sup>120</sup> However, Luther insisted these works are not salvific. Only faith in Christ can save.

Table 17 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>121</sup> Noteworthy here is the virtual absence of the law in its first two uses. Figure 19 below

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<sup>117</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 383.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>121</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon. Luther offered extended gospel promises related to justification, while simultaneously extending legal imperatives to pursue sanctification.

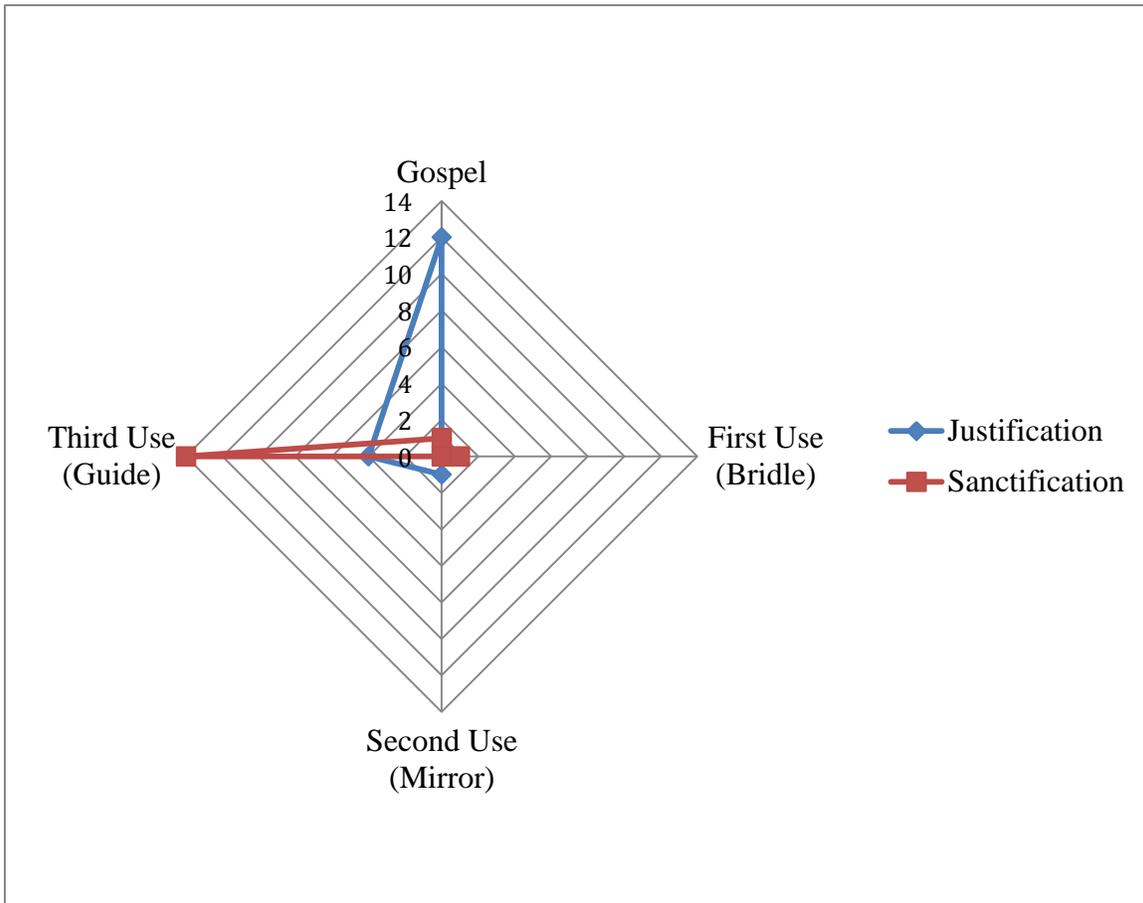


Figure 19. Law and gospel in Acts 9:1-19

### Redemptive-Historical Analysis

This sermon is noteworthy for its inclusion of several clear gospel caveats, which remind the hearer that only faith in Christ is salvific. Here lie the clearest representations of imperatives that safely avoid the "Deadly Be" label. Nevertheless, several concerns with this sermon remain. First, Luther's harsh rebuke of Catholicism

hardly seems consistent with RHP, not to mention most other homiletical schools of thought. While certainly the RH school would reject the bankrupt theology of the papacy in Luther's day, they would rightly blush at the name-calling he employed to make his point.

Second, this sermon featured apparent exemplaristic language that runs counter to the RH school: "Paul is presented to us as an example,"<sup>122</sup> and "all this [Paul's conversion] has happened to [serve as] an example and a comfort for us."<sup>123</sup> However, upon closer examination of Luther's argument, it is evident that Luther is not urging his hearers to "be like" Paul actually. In fact, the seemingly exemplaristic tone is in fact referring to Paul's conversion story as an illustration of grace. Luther states, "[Paul] is put forward as an example of grace even to us."<sup>124</sup> In other words, nothing in this seemingly exemplaristic section would likely unsettle the redemptive-historical homiletician.

The final analysis of the sermon reveals an exposition that closely conforms to RHP guidelines, other than a smattering of regretful barbs directed towards his opponents. Most notable in this sermon is Luther's conclusion, which is practically pristine in its presentation of both law and gospel.

### **Matthew 11:25-30**

Luther's 1546 sermon on Matthew 11:25-30 is included to help demonstrate his homiletical progression.<sup>125</sup> His 1517 sermon on the same text was a strong Christ-centered exposition, albeit a flawed one. He failed on occasion to sufficiently qualify his imperatives with gospel indicatives. Furthermore, he employed the patriarch Abram as an

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<sup>122</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 377.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see *ibid.*, 383–92. Also, *WA*, 51: 187-94.

exemplar. The result was a sermon replete with mention of Christ, but nonetheless hindered by prescriptive and exemplaristic elements. The 1525 sermon lacked the exemplaristic tones from the first sermon, but it retained a significant number of imperatives unqualified by gospel indicatives. The third sermon on this text reveals similar features within Luther's homiletic.

This sermon is also noteworthy as the reformer's final exposition before his death on February 18, 1546. This is the third sermon herein based on Jesus' famous words: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30).

### **Contextual Analysis**

On January 28, 1546, Luther finally arrived in Eisleben, over a month after the initial summons. The negotiations between the feuding counts were grueling, especially for someone as "old and weak" as he.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, he refused to stop preaching. He preached four sermons while assisting with the mediation: on January 31, February 2, February 7, and his final sermon on February 15.<sup>127</sup> In these sermons, Luther claimed that though the church was not perfect or pure, her doctrine must be. Therefore, the preaching and teaching of the Word of God could not be overemphasized. To that end, the aging reformer ordained two pastors while in Eisleben in an effort to strengthen the church.<sup>128</sup>

Nevertheless, the conditions in Eisleben were grim. In a letter to Melanchthon,

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<sup>126</sup>Brecht, *Luther: 1532-1546*, 370.

<sup>127</sup>Conflicting accounts remain regarding the actual date of this sermon. The transcriber recorded the date as February 15, which was a Monday. However, some historians believe Luther actually delivered the sermon on Sunday, February 14. See *ibid.*, 372.

<sup>128</sup>Marty, *Martin Luther*, 183.

he lamented that all the devils in hell had congregated in the city.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, even this would not dampen Luther's passion for the pulpit. He did not refuse the opportunity to preach the gospel just days before his final breath. When he took the pulpit for the last time, it is no surprise to find him once again revisiting the familiar text in Matthew 11.

### **Textual Analysis**

In the final sermon, Luther began by discussing the wise from whom the Father hides. He stated, "The wise and understanding in the world so contrive things that God cannot be favorable and good to them."<sup>130</sup> These people are wise in their own eyes, thinking "what God has done is too poor and insignificant, even childish and foolish; I must add something to it."<sup>131</sup> Examples of this included the Anabaptists, the antisacramentarians, the pope, and the government, among others. The wisdom that Christ gives is diametrically opposed to this worldly wisdom. The truly wise ask God to rule. They listen to Christ, they listen to his word, and they listen to their pastors. They listen and obey their government, insofar as they do not encroach upon matters of faith.

Luther concluded by urging his hearers to come to Christ for rest. He reminded them this rest may come through trials; therefore, the Christian must cling to Christ. However, even during these trials the Christian experiences incredible rest. Through God's Spirit "the burden, which for the world would be unbearable, becomes for you a light burden."<sup>132</sup> Luther was speaking from experience. His sickness had worsened and forced him to cut his sermon short. He ended by saying, "This and much more might be said concerning this Gospel, but I am too weak and we shall let it go at that."<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Brecht, *Luther: 1532-1546*, 373.

<sup>130</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 384.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*

## Rhetorical Analysis

Much like the other two sermons on this text, Luther's *inventio* here unquestionably slants towards the final two uses of the law. He employed the first once, threatening the worldly wise with impending judgment. He utilized the law in its second use as a mirror at least 21 times to reveal the pervasiveness of worldly wisdom in both the secular sphere, and the church. The law in its third use appeared 23 times. These imperatives are primarily expressions of Christianity's *subsequent imperative*, namely, requiring obedience in the pursuit of sanctification.

Also noteworthy is the various forms these imperatives took throughout the exposition. They appeared in the first person plural: "*We should listen to God's Word;*"<sup>134</sup> the second person plural: "*You ought to lift up your hands and rejoice;*"<sup>135</sup> and the third person plural: "Right preachers should diligently and faithfully *teach only the Word of God.*"<sup>136</sup> Luther even extended an implied imperative in the first person singular: "I shall believe in Christ; he is the one God bids me to listen to, from him he bids me to learn what real, divine wisdom and understanding is."<sup>137</sup> Most compelling are the imperatives that Luther delivered as if from the mouth of Christ: "*come to me;* and if you are facing oppression, death, or torture, because the pope, the Turk, and emperor are attacking you, *do not be afraid.*"<sup>138</sup> Luther's practice in this sermon revealed considerable diversity in his approach to preaching imperatives.

Unlike the first treatment of this passage above, Luther's *dispositio* in this sermon reveals a recognizable pattern. He began with an overwhelming portion of the

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<sup>134</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 391. Emphasis added.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, 390. Emphasis added.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 388. Emphasis added.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*, 392. Emphasis added.

law in its second use. The worldly wise whom Christ opposes are everywhere: the papacy, the radicals, the sectarians, the government, and all throughout the church. After revealing the pervasiveness of this sin, Luther employed the third use to instruct his people: “Let the pope, emperor, the mighty, and the learned be wise; but don’t you follow them, even though they were a thousand times wiser than they are.”<sup>139</sup> This function of the law persisted through the remainder of the sermon. Luther did feature gospel promises in this section, for only by grace is the burden of following Jesus made light. Nonetheless, the emphasis in the second half of the sermon was primarily on the call to come to Christ and cling to him, not the promises of rest.

Table 18. Law and gospel in Matthew 11:25-30 (1546)

<i>Gospel</i>		<i>First Use (Bridle)</i>	<i>Second Use (Mirror)</i>	<i>Third Use (Guide)</i>
Justification	1	1	12	--
Sanctification	4	--	9	23
<i>Total</i>	5	1	21	23

Table 18 above quantifies the uses of the law and gospel in this sermon.<sup>140</sup> Noteworthy here is the heavy emphasis on the third use, particularly in contrast with his other sermons on the same text. Figure 20 below offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in this sermon.

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<sup>139</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 390.

<sup>140</sup>To review each particular instance of law and gospel from this sermon, see appendix 1.

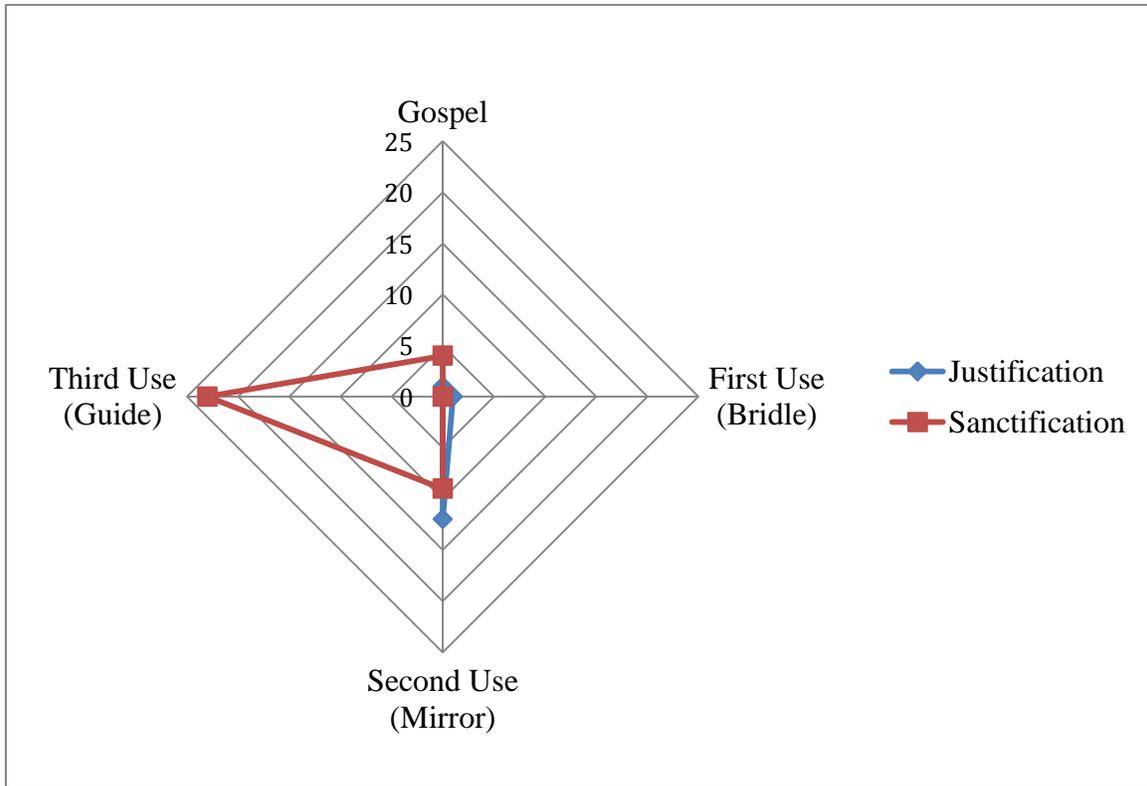


Figure 20. Law and gospel in Matthew 11:25-30 (1546)

### Redemptive-Historical Analysis

Luther's last sermon is a powerful testament to the necessity of Christ-centered expository preaching. Luther exclaimed,

Right preachers should diligently and faithfully teach only the Word of God and seek only his honor and praise. Likewise, the hearers also should say: I do not believe in my pastor, but he tells me of another Lord, whose name is Christ; him he shows to me; I will listen to him, in so far as he leads me to the true Teacher and Master, God's Son. . . . None other should be preached or taught except the Son of God alone.<sup>141</sup>

Luther doubtlessly considered himself such a Christ-centered preacher. After all, he later admonished his hearers to say to all preachers, "If you want to teach Christ to me, I shall gladly listen to you, otherwise not, even if you were an angel from heaven."<sup>142</sup>

<sup>141</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 388.

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid.*, 391.

Nonetheless, this version of Christ-centered preaching fails to satisfy redemptive-historical standards. At the outset of the sermon, Luther masterfully employed the law to reveal the sinfulness of his hearers. Nevertheless, rather than driving them to promises of grace he concluded by commanding them to persevere in obedience. This sermon is a clear illustration of a “Be Disciplined” message, discernible by commands to “remain confident,”<sup>143</sup> “cling only to Christ’s Word,”<sup>144</sup> “stick to [Christ],”<sup>145</sup> “hold on to [the] Word,”<sup>146</sup> and Christ’s admonition “if you have my Word, then stick to it.”<sup>147</sup> A consistent application of the redemptive-historical homiletic would undoubtedly question even a modicum of Christ-centeredness with a climax centered on law. Nevertheless, in Luther’s mind, driving his hearers to Christ’s yoke was the same as driving them to Christ.

### Summary

The preaching of the mature Luther exceeds the other two epochs in its preponderance of law. As the antinomian controversy escalated, the reformer's homiletical emphases adapted to the needs of his congregation. His 1539 exposition on 1 Peter 4:7-11 was a fierce condemnation of drunkenness, heavy laden with unqualified law. His 1544 sermon from Revelation 12 featured extensive references to Christ, but an abundance of the third use was equally present. His 1545 sermon on Hebrews 13:4 was a powerful exposition on Christian marriage, filled with unqualified imperatives. His final sermon, another exposition of Matthew 11:25-30, was a clear example of a "Be

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<sup>143</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 392.

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, 390.

Disciplined" message.

Table 19. *Usus legis* from 1533-1546

<i>Year</i>	<i>Sermon</i>	<i>Gospel</i>	<i>First Use</i>	<i>Second Use</i>	<i>Third Use</i>
1539	1 Peter 4:7-11	2	4	15	35
1544	Revelation 12:7-12	16	2	5	19
1545	Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:4	19	--	3	9
1545	Hebrews 13:4	9	5	10	28
1546	Acts 9:1-9	13	1	1	18
1546	Matthew 11:25-30	5	1	21	23
<i>Total</i>		64	13	55	132
<i>Average</i>		10.67	2.17	9.17	22

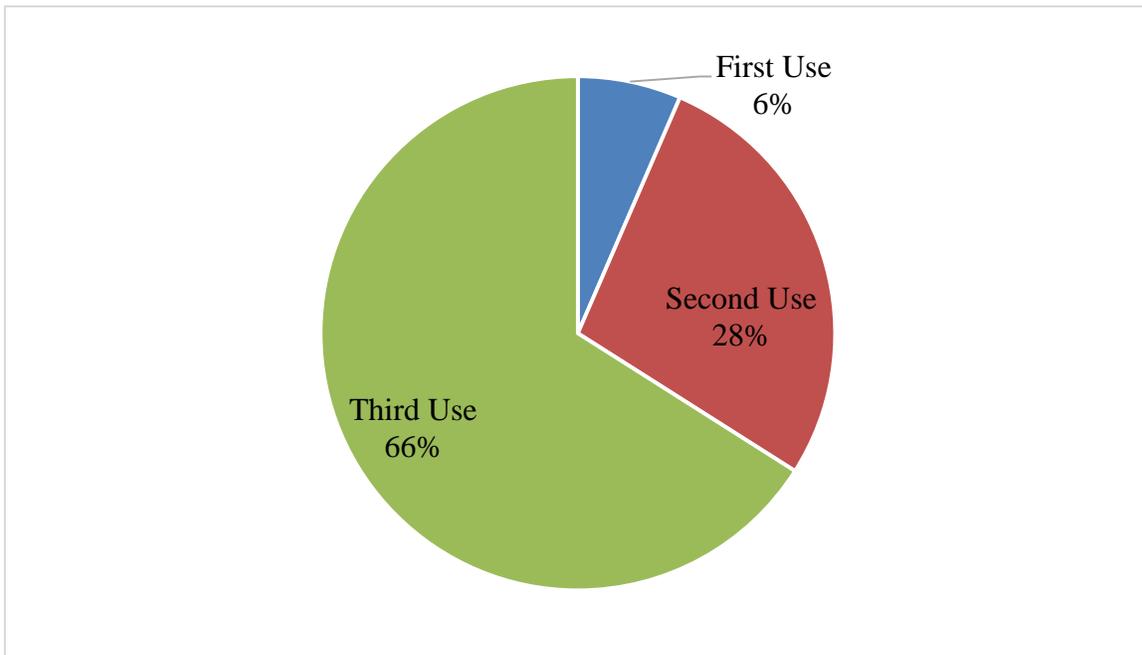


Figure 21. *Usus Legis* from 1533-1546

The only clear exceptions to this pattern are his 1545 sermon based on prophecies from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 and his 1546 sermon on Paul's conversion

from Acts 9. The latter sermon features a near-pristine dialectic between law and gospel. Its only flaws rest in the blistering rebukes Luther employed towards his theological opponents. The former sermon stands alone as a stainless example of Christ-centered preaching that would likely satisfy the criteria set by redemptive-historical theorists.

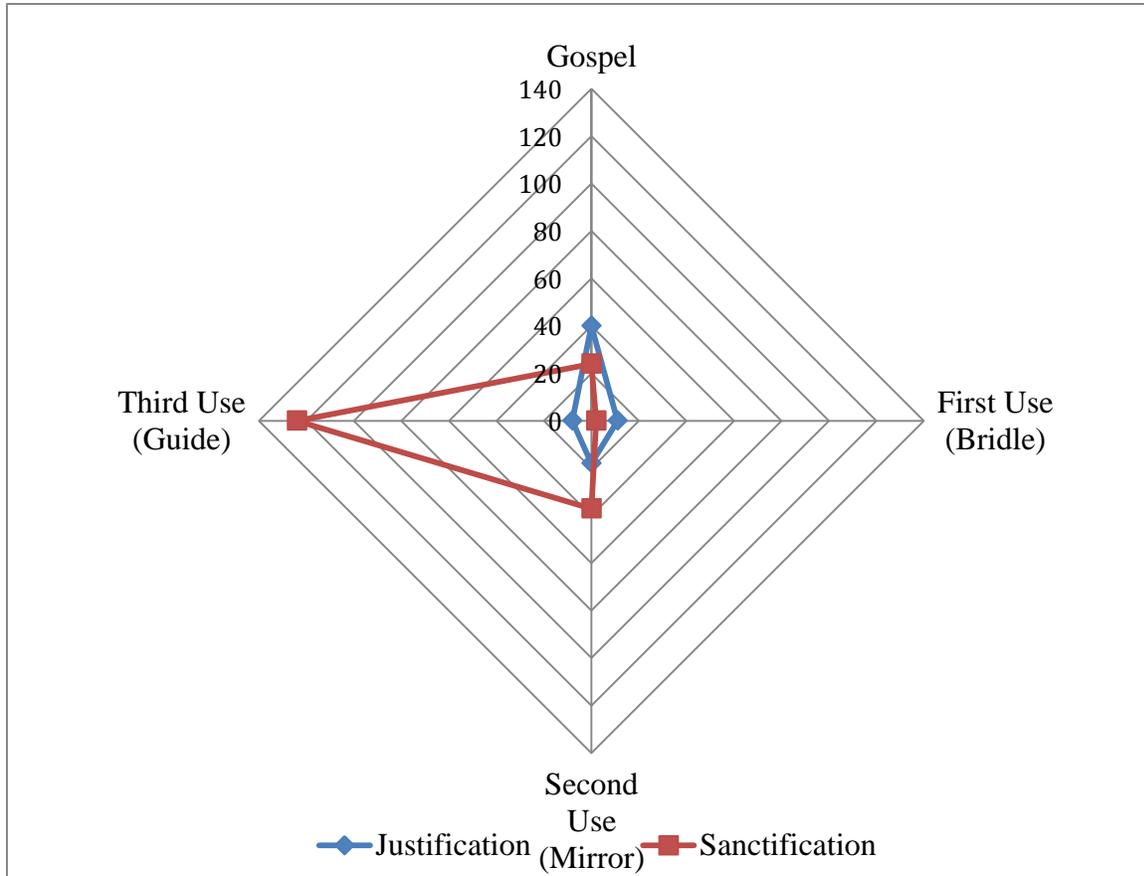


Figure 22. Law and gospel from 1533-1546

Table 19 above quantifies the uses of the law in sermons from the mature Luther. He employed the law as bridle an average of 2.17 times per sermon, as mirror 9.17 times per sermon, and as guide 22 times per sermon. He extended gospel promises on average 10.67 times per sermon. These numbers are relatively consistent with a more extensive analysis in Appendix Two. Most notable in this epoch is an average increase in

the use of the law as bridle, and a further increase in the third use of the law. Figure 21 above depicts the uses of the law graphically as a percentage of the whole. When he employed the law in these sermons, 66 percent of those instances featured the third use, 28 percent featured the second use, and 6 percent featured the law in its first use. Figure 22 above offers a graphic depiction of the uses of law and gospel in Luther's final years. Once again, this epoch is characterized by an abundance of legal imperatives in this epoch. Luther devoted significant energies to promoting holiness among his hearers by preaching the law in its third use.

CHAPTER 8  
GOSPEL-DOMINATED LAW: THE ROLE OF IMPERATIVES  
IN CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING

What can one conclude after analyzing Luther's preaching from all three epochs of his life? Does the reformer successfully comply with the redemptive-historical standards for Christ-centered legitimacy? If not, what can Luther's homiletic offer the modern preacher by way of contrast? This chapter attempts to answer these questions and more. First, it attempts a final analysis on Luther's preaching from a redemptive-historical perspective. Then it presents nine principles gleaned from his preaching of the law to help correct the potential for expositional imbalance in the RH homiletic. The goal herein is to feature principles gleaned from Luther's use of the law in service of a Christ-centered homiletic that rightly proclaims Christ while not neglecting the importance of imperatives.

**A Sub-Christian Preacher**

After a detailed analysis of Luther's preaching, one thing is clear: Luther is not a redemptive-historical preacher. Some might contend that expecting a sixteenth century reformer to conform to a modern homiletic is woefully anachronistic. Perhaps, but the primary reason for this investigation was the exclusivistic claims of the RH school, claims that speak to the past as well as the present. If the predominant tone of redemptive-historical advocates were one of *preference* rather than exclusivity, this dissertation would be wholly unnecessary. Even a redemptive-historical argument for homiletical *superiority* would be relatively easy to tolerate. Nevertheless, it is claims of *exclusivity* that pervade the discipline. For many, the popular term for non-conformist

sermons is not sub-*optimal* or sub-*par*, but sub-*Christian*.

### **Contextual Atomism**

Can one fairly argue that Luther is a sub-Christian preacher? If the principles of the redemptive-historical school are granted and strictly applied, one has little other alternative. For example, RHP upholds a twofold homiletical necessity to (1) preach Christ as the focal point of Scripture and (2) preach the redemptive storyline of Scripture. However, Luther seems to abide by the former and abandon the latter. Few would dispute Luther's Christ-centeredness (first necessity) in the sermons considered above. From Exodus to Revelation he consistently preached Christ. It does not take much investigation to find Christ as the focal point of his sermons, although he sometimes used disputable hermeneutics to achieve this outcome. Nevertheless, Luther was a *Solus Christus* preacher if ever there was one.

However, the second homiletical necessity—requiring the preacher to proclaim the redemptive storyline of Scripture—was virtually absent from the sermons considered. A careful analysis reveals Luther's consistent failure to place passages explicitly within the grand storyline of the Bible. His approach was contextually atomistic at best.<sup>1</sup> He seemed far more interested in dealing with the text at hand. Was he merely ignorant of Scripture's redemptive storyline? Was he ambivalent? Alternatively, perhaps he simply did not consider an explicit biblical theology as essential to every sermon.

Is it reasonable to judge Luther by his failure to employ biblical theology? After all, the discipline as characterized by RHP was not developed until theologians like

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to say that Luther never utilized something like biblical theology in his preaching. William Marsh effectively argues that Luther's was "a biblical theology borne from [his] extensive exegetical, hermeneutical, and translational labors over Scripture as the Word of God." William M. Marsh, "Martin Luther's Messianic Rationale for Christ as the *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture in His Prefaces to the Bible" (Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 4–5.

Geerhardus Vos published their seminal works in the late 1940s. Is it anachronistic to assess sixteenth century sermons with a twentieth century rubric? This potential for anachronism must be overlooked as long as the proponents for RHP insist that the proper application of a twentieth century discipline is essential for a sermon to qualify as legitimately Christian. In other words, if biblical theology is truly a homiletical necessity, its application should be evenly distributed throughout Christian history, not simply among homileticians after Vos.

Perhaps this “homiletical necessity” is not truly representative of redemptive-historical thought. Maybe this standard is a fiction contrived by opponents as a sort of straw man argument. However, in the words of Edmund Clowney, “Preachers who ignore the history of redemption in their preaching are ignoring the witness of the Holy Spirit to Jesus in all the Scriptures.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, ignoring the redemptive storyline is a failure to preach Jesus accurately. David Prince similarly argues, “One fully exposes the meaning of the text only in light of the biblical storyline.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, ignoring the redemptive storyline is a failure to preach the meaning of the text accurately. Dennis Johnson concurs,

To preach the whole Bible as Christian Scripture means to take the context of the whole canon into account as we proclaim any text—not only the Scriptures already extant when a particular passage was given, but also those given in subsequent epochs of redemptive history.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, failure to preach the redemptive storyline is a categorical failure to preach the Bible as Christian Scripture. The homiletical necessity of biblical theology is no straw

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<sup>2</sup>Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 10.

<sup>3</sup>David Edward Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 161.

<sup>4</sup>Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 241.

man, but pervades the RH school. However, Luther repeatedly lacked an explicit utilization of this necessary tool in his sermons.

### **Homiletical Inconsistency**

To understand Luther's failure to comply with RHP tenets, one must consider another pillar, namely, the heightened emphasis of the individual sermon. The redemptive-historical school maintains that the homiletical moves towards empowering grace must occur in every sermon. Indeed, the "Deadly Be's" are so deadly because they fail to remind the hearer that God's grace is what enables them to "be like" a faithful saint, "be good" by obeying God's Word, or "be disciplined" in their pursuit of sanctification. After all, only the most radical redemptive-historical proponents would suggest that these nonredemptive elements are intrinsically wrong. As Chapell explains, "*Be' messages are not wrong in themselves; they are wrong messages by themselves.*"<sup>5</sup> The failure of the sub-Christian sermon is often a sin of *omission* before it is a sin of *commission*.

How then does Luther fare in light of this standard? The results are not encouraging. Studying the law-gospel preaching of Luther reveals an apparent disparity between Luther's teaching and his preaching. The centrality of the law-gospel dialectic to Luther's thought is unquestioned. However, what Luther presents with doctrinal precision in his lectures and commentaries appears in raw form in the pulpit. He calls for a law-gospel duet in the classroom, but often delivers a dialectical solo in the pulpit. Preaching the law as Luther did would warrant cries of legalism among many of today's homiletical elite.

Is this a contradiction in Luther's thought? Did Luther say one thing about law and gospel and do another? Some might consider Luther's pulpit use of law and gospel as

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<sup>5</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 294. Emphasis original.

a sort of homiletical inconsistency, not representative of his thinking on the subject. They argue that his theological writings, which purportedly deny the third use of the law, deserve primacy over his preaching practices. Perhaps Luther simply neglected to follow his own philosophy of preaching. After all, what preacher is always thoroughly consistent? While Luther's theological writings may occasionally boast a greater clarity than his preaching, his sermons remain a vast resource worthy of equal consideration. Furthermore, it is reasonable to conclude that Luther's pulpit *practice* should be the lens through which one views his *philosophy* of law/gospel.

A better way to understand this apparent contradiction is with a wide-angle view of Luther's preaching. Luther would have nothing to do with the cookie-cutter approaches of many modern homiletical theorists. He was content with slowly building an overall foundation of law and gospel for his people.<sup>6</sup> An isolated glance at individual sermons may paint Luther as sometimes antinomian and other times legalistic. However, Luther's problem was not a homiletical inconsistency. His strategy was to ground his people firmly in the two languages of law and gospel, a foundation that was unnecessary to construct in every single sermon.

One may respond that an approach like Luther's demeans the sermon. After all, is not the homiletical theory that *heightens* the importance of the individual sermon preferable? Is it wise to uphold a homiletic that *diminishes* the sermon's importance? Perhaps this is a false dichotomy. A heightened importance of the individual sermon may

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<sup>6</sup>For example, in his 1544 exposition on Rom 8:18-23, he admitted, "I cannot expound everything in a single sermon." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 58, *Sermons V*, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2010), 164. Also, in a 1545 sermon on Ephesians 5:15-20, he lamented, "what we have built up over twenty years a wicked man [can destroy] in one or two sermons." *Ibid.*, 300. See also, the *Invocavit Sermons*, wherein Luther repeatedly espouses a long-term view for reform. *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 69–100.

seem noble, but in actuality, what one maximizes in the short-term becomes minimized in the long term. When the individual sermon is so elevated that the preacher must tack a gospel proviso onto every imperative, both law and gospel diminish. In other words, the RH approach does not preach the gospel too much, but too narrowly.

For example, one should consider the occasional outrage that ensues when the preacher heightens the importance of the individual text. Some would quickly demonize any sermon that faithfully expounds a particular text without properly placing it in its overall redemptive context. Such sermons are “atomistic,” force-feeding the congregation with bite-sized fragments of Scripture that can only truly nourish when presented in conjunction with their biblical-theological whole. Nevertheless, the redemptive-historical school requires with the sermon what it forbids with the Scripture. A hyper-important view of the individual sermon is ironically atomistic, forcing the preacher to do in every sermon what he has historically accomplished throughout his faithful pulpit ministry. The redemptive-historical approach may eschew hermeneutical atomism in the study, but it unwittingly embraces homiletical atomism in the pulpit.

### **Gospel Negligence**

Finally, to understand Luther’s failure to comply with RHP tenets, one should consider the so-called “Deadly Be’s.” If Luther can escape the “sub-Christian” label, he must consistently avoid these nonredemptive components in his sermons. As this dissertation has shown, the crucial element in the “Deadly Be” label is the imperative. After all, the verb “be” in the three types of nonredemptive messages is imperatival.

The simplest way to avoid the hazards of nonredemptive sermons is to qualify imperatives with gospel indicatives quickly and explicitly. Goldsworthy explains,

To say what we should be or do and not link it with a clear exposition of what God has done about our failure to be or do perfectly as he wills is to reject the grace of God and to lead people to lust after self-help and self-improvement in a way that, to

call a spade a spade, is godless.<sup>7</sup>

Generally, these homileticians recommend that imperatives be qualified with one of four indicative truths. First, preachers can qualify imperatives by reminding their hearers that they are powerless to obey them. Second, preachers can remind their hearers that their obedience does not merit God's favor. Third, their obedience should be in response to Christ's obedience. Fourth, Christ has already fulfilled this imperative perfectly on the believer's behalf. What is not clear is how quickly or how many qualifications should follow each imperative. Nevertheless, the need for these qualifications remains an essential component of the RH homiletic.

How then does Luther fare? Sermons like his 1516 treatment of Psalm 19 and his 1544 analysis of the promises in Isaiah 25 Hosea 13 were void of any unqualified imperatives. His 1517 sermon on *Three Kinds of Good Life* and his 1545 exposition of Acts 9 narrowly escaped the “Deadly Be” label. The remaining twelve analyses feature a motley collection of exemplaristic, prescriptive, and exhortative preaching. To paraphrase Goldsworthy, more often than not Luther preached sermons that, to call a spade a spade, were godless.

Luther seemed to be guilty of a form of gospel negligence. Either he frequently forgot “what God has done about our failure be or do perfectly as he wills,” or he absentmindedly overlooked the need of his people to hear the same. On the other hand, the reason behind this apparent gospel negligence could be even more nefarious. Perhaps Luther actually denied the validity of the gospel realities that he so often failed to link with his imperatives. Perish the thought. No, Luther did not deny the gospel. Nor did he

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<sup>7</sup>Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 119. See also, Bryan Chapell who states, “There are many ‘be’ messages in Scripture, but they always reside in a redemptive context. Since we cannot be anything that God would approve of apart from his sanctifying mercy and power, *grace must permeate any exhortation for biblical behavior.*” Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 294. Emphasis added.

suffer from gospel negligence. The truth is, Luther thoroughly believed preaching Scripture's imperatives *is* preaching the gospel, since the two are inextricably connected.

One has little recourse. Either the parameters for Christ-centered legitimacy are too narrow or Martin Luther, one of the most Christ-saturated preachers in church history, was a sub-Christian preacher. One should consider the import of the latter option. Many within the homiletical elite issue blistering condemnation towards those who fail to say rightly the redemptive-historical *shibboleth*. These preachers are sub-Christian, anti-Christian, godless, demonic tools of Satan. A consistent application of this rhetoric would require the same vitriol towards the preaching of the Father of the Reformation.

### **Gospel-Dominated Law**

This dissertation does not aim to condemn redemptive-historical preaching, but to propose a more inclusive alternative. It has posited an exclusivistic leaning within redemptive-historical preaching and has analyzed a sample of Luther's preaching. What then can it offer as a corrective? Here Luther's law-gospel paradigm is essential. Understanding his law/gospel exposition—particularly his preaching of the law—may greatly benefit the popular understanding of Christ-centered preaching.

Although Luther's preaching was not consistently *gospel-centered* the way the term is often employed in popular literature today, it was *gospel-dominated* even when it featured a preponderance of law. In other words, even when Luther's exposition did not *center* on the gospel, it remained *dominated* by it. Edward Engelbrecht explains the concept of gospel-dominance as characteristic of Luther's preaching:

By *dominance* of the Gospel, I do not mean simply that a message contains more Gospel than Law. Some preachers might adopt that as a goal but it is not always what we see in the Scriptures, Luther's sermons, or the messages of other faithful teachers. The proclamation of the Law often takes more space, depending on the state of the hearers. . . . By dominance, I mean that the proclamation of the Law serves the purpose of the Gospel: our forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ alone. This requires sensitivity to the hearers, addressing their sins appropriately with the Law so that the Gospel may do its life-giving work. It also means

proclaiming the Gospel vigorously as our only hope and comfort.<sup>8</sup>

Even when Luther preached the law unabashedly, he still allowed his imperatives to be dominated by the gospel. This gospel-dominated use of the law may be a noteworthy corrective to prevailing opinions, and is visible in nine principles gleaned from Luther's homiletical practice.

### **Preach the Law Textually**

When determining how to preach the law effectively, the preacher must consider the text. The preacher's primary responsibility is to communicate a faithful exposition of Scripture. Luther's most law-heavy sermons are also the sermons on Scriptural imperatives. Passages like 1 Peter 4:7, with its injunctions to sobriety, result in sermons laced with law. In his funeral sermon on 1 Thessalonians 4, Luther's imperatives on grieving mirrored the text itself. The same is true in his sermon *On the Cross and Suffering*. The analysis of his sermon on Jude revealed a surprising union between the indicative-imperative nature of the text and the sermon. The principle is simple, but profound: the preacher's use of the law should properly reflect the emphasis of the text.

This is not to argue for *law-centered* preaching to replace *gospel-centered* preaching. Lest the pendulum swing to the other extreme, Luther's exposition of the resurrection promises in Hosea and Isaiah create balance. Here Luther conforms to RH criteria more consistently than in any other sermon. That analysis revealed the helpful principle that a sermon likely *should* conform to the radical measures of the RH school when the text itself is radically gospel-soaked and Christ-centered. To turn a sermon on such a text into a fiery exposition of law would have been a categorical mistake. As John Frame argues, "We should not demand that a preacher emphasize something that is not emphasized in his text."<sup>9</sup> The central issue really is, as one RH critic has put it, to

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<sup>8</sup>Edward A. Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law: Luther's Use of the Law for Christian Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 244-45.

<sup>9</sup> John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship*  
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*privilege the text.*<sup>10</sup>

The importance of allowing the text to dictate the law-gospel emphasis of the sermon is native to Luther himself. Later in life, someone asked him whether law or gospel should receive greater prominence in the sermon. His answer reflected his robust understanding of law and gospel and his confidence in the Word of God. He replied,

This shouldn't and can't be comprehended in a fixed rule. Christ himself preached [the law and the gospel] according to his circumstances. As a passage or text indicates, therefore, one should take up the law and the gospel, for one must have both. It isn't right to draw everything into the gospel alone; nor is it good always to preach the law alone. The Scriptures themselves, if properly adhered to, will give the answer.<sup>11</sup>

Luther's willingness to give the Scriptures the final say is evident beyond the sixteen analyses herein. In a 1545 sermon on Ephesians 5:15-20<sup>12</sup> Luther preached a sermon loaded with imperatives, not surprising given the text's imperatival nature.<sup>13</sup> In a 1546 sermon on the gospel from Titus 3:4-8,<sup>14</sup> Luther almost avoided the third use

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(Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 292.

<sup>10</sup>Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013).

<sup>11</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 54, *Table Talk*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 404.

<sup>12</sup>"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:15-20).

<sup>13</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 295-302. See appendix 2 for further analysis.

<sup>14</sup>"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people"

entirely while repeatedly magnifying the promises of the gospel.<sup>15</sup> In short, Luther strove to preach law and gospel in a manner that properly reflected the emphasis of the text

How should the preacher respond to this observation of Luther's preaching?

The preacher must beware of the danger of superimposing law or gospel over the clear sense of the text. Although most passages contain some element of both law and gospel, the primary focus of the sermon should correlate with the primary focus of the text.<sup>16</sup> As William Marsh explains, "Law and gospel transcend the Old and New Testaments, even though both parts of the Christian Bible have their own respective "chief teaching."<sup>17</sup> Luther explained, "Nevertheless just as the chief teaching of the New Testament is really the proclamation of grace and peace through the forgiveness of sins in Christ, so the chief teaching of the Old Testament is really the teaching of laws, the showing up of sin, and the demanding of good."<sup>18</sup> The preacher should strive to emphasize the "chief teaching" of the text.

### **Preach the Law Forcefully**

Luther often preached the law forcefully. Such forceful preaching was not a capricious exercise, but one bound by necessity. First, he was bound by God to preach forcefully on occasion. In a 1544 sermon regarding betrothals he explained, "If, [as I said], I judge harshly, what else should I do? It is my duty to preach the Word of God and

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(Titus 3:4-8).

<sup>15</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 388-96. See appendix 2 for further analysis.

<sup>16</sup>"Most texts assigned to the law have also a gospel side, just as most texts assigned to the gospel have also a law side." Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 269.

<sup>17</sup>William M. Marsh, "Martin Luther's Messianic Rationale," 188.

<sup>18</sup>Martin Luther, "Prefaces to the Old Testament," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament I*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 237.

to tear to pieces the work of the devil."<sup>19</sup> Second, he was bound by his desire for personal salvation. Failure to persevere by obeying the Lord would be indicative of a lack of saving faith. In a 1545 sermon on 1 John 4:16-21 he lamented, "Let the devil be your preacher. If I see peasants, townsmen, noblemen and do not chastise them, then I will go to the devil along with you."<sup>20</sup> Third, Luther was bound to preach forcefully by the sinfulness of sin. He explained in his commentary on Galatians,

[Sin] is a great and terrible monster and for the overthrowing of it, God hath need of a mighty hammer, that is, the law, which is in its proper office when it accuseth and revealeth sin after this sort: Behold thou hast transgressed all the commandments of God and so it striketh terror into the conscience, so that it feeleth God to be offended indeed, and itself to be guilty of eternal death."<sup>21</sup>

Some preachers, in a noble effort to emphasize the beauty of the gospel, attempt to soften the appearance of this hammer. The result is hearers not sufficiently frightened by the law. In these "honeyed" sermons, the hammer of the law looks more like a child's toy. Such cannot be said of Luther's preaching.

Luther forcefully employed the law to threaten the sinner. In the sermons analyzed here, he threatened damnation to those who lacked compassion for their neighbor, a plague from the devil for those who refused to listen to the Word, banishment from the Sacrament for those who failed to teach their children the catechism, and hellfire for drunkards and adulterers. In other sermons, he threatened "the abyss of hell," the darkening of the sun, "bitter death," invasion by the Turks, and even the hangman and the executioner's block. Perhaps even more telling is the language he used to describe the sinner: "children of wrath," "damned," "polluted," "shameful," "unbelievers," "ungodly sinners," "impudent," "stubborn," "rascal[s]," "blasphemers," "revilers," "godless,"

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<sup>19</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 87.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 234-35.

<sup>21</sup>Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, ed. John Prince Fallowes, trans. Erasmus Middleton (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1979), 190.

"carnal," "sensual," "beastly," "ignorant," "blockheads," "wanton," "defiant," "arrogant," "riffraff," "villains," "piggish," "filthy," "gluttonous," "hogs," "beggars," "adulterous," "rabble," "coarse," "insolent," "foolish," and "wiseacres."<sup>22</sup> These are just the words Luther used to describe the sin prevalent among his hearers; his language against religious opponents was even more blistering.

The point here is not to supply the modern preacher with vocabulary for Sunday's sermon. Such a haphazard application of Luther's homiletic would certainly be unwise. As Kiessling explains,

The busy preacher of modern times who goes to Luther on a Saturday night to seek practical hints for his Sunday sermon, only to be disappointed, will hardly appreciate how much Protestant preaching was influenced by him. The difference between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries is after all too great in most cases for direct appropriation. Nor can the heroic words of a man who was changing the course of history be applied without modification to a more settled even if troubled age.<sup>23</sup>

How then can Luther's sometimes-forceful handling of the law apply to this settled age? At the very least, preachers must be encouraged to proclaim the law as law, resisting the urge to soften its force for confronting sin.

### **Preach the Law Discerningly**

Nevertheless, one should reject the notion that the reformer was a firebrand, fear-mongering preacher who salivated at the chance to frighten his people. Luther preached the law with discernment, carefully empathizing with his people before entering into the pulpit. He believed that knowing whether to emphasize law or gospel is an exercise of rightly understanding the congregation. Lohse writes,

Where the "law" is in fact already encountered, in suffering, temptation, or other

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<sup>22</sup>For these and similar remarks, see Luther, *LW*, 30: 204-13. Luther, *LW*, 51: 8-11, 18, 70, 96, 137, 141, 201-04, 243, 292-94, 361-67, 384. Luther, *LW*, 58: 70, 157, 169, 250, 278-79, 301, 374.

<sup>23</sup>Elmer Carl Kiessling, *The Early Sermons of Luther and Their Relation to the Pre Reformation Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1935), 147.

severe experiences, the preaching of the gospel is to be given priority. On the other hand, where the law is denied through self-confidence or hubris, a too hasty preaching of the gospel would only lead to one's feeling supported in self-righteousness. Luther's distinction is clearly related to the context of proclamation.<sup>24</sup>

While Lohse writes primarily regarding the law's accusatory function, the principle remains true: the preacher must discern the spiritual status of his congregation before he can preach the law accurately. Wade Johnston aptly remarked concerning Luther's 1545 sermon on Galatians 5:16-24, "Luther's serial discussion of Paul's catalog of vices . . . is shaped by the biblical text as well as by the present condition and concerns of the Wittenberg congregation, to which Luther responds pastorally."<sup>25</sup>

Plenty examples of this principle are manifest in Luther's preaching. In a 1532 funeral sermon, he explicated gospel promises no fewer than thirty-two times in a relatively brief sermon, demonstrating a profound pastoral sensitivity to the grief of his people.<sup>26</sup> Conversely, in the aforementioned sermon on Ephesians 5:15-20, Luther delivered a "stern admonition"<sup>27</sup> loaded with thirty-two legal imperatives and thirty-three accusatory indicatives.<sup>28</sup> Particularly noteworthy in this sermon is its historical ties to the errors of antinomianism, an "abomination [that] has intruded more and more over time."<sup>29</sup>

James McCue offers further insight on the importance of preaching the law with discernment. He postulates that the cultural fixation with penance in Luther's day formed the milieu of Luther's "'obsession' with forgiveness of sin."<sup>30</sup> Without correctly

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<sup>24</sup>Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 269.

<sup>25</sup>Wade R. Johnston, Luther, *LW*, 58: 281. Emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 243-55. See appendix 2 for further analysis.

<sup>27</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 294.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 295-302. See appendix 2 for further analysis.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>30</sup>James F. McCue, "Luther and the Problem of Popular Preaching," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 16, no. 1 (1985): 34.

understanding these cultural and theological developments in Luther's day, the preaching of law and gospel that mimics his style can be dangerous. "The gospel—understood in Lutheran fashion as the proclamation of the unconditional forgiveness of sin for Christ's sake—is not addressed to every casual passer-by," McCue explains.<sup>31</sup> Preachers should reserve the gospel for those overwhelmed by the seriousness of sin. "Where the gospel is proclaimed to a different sort of audience, the results, according to Luther, can be disastrous."<sup>32</sup> The problem, as McCue sees it, is "how to preach when the congregation does not consist of pious souls who have been trying all their lives to please God and who are ready to collapse into despair with the effort."<sup>33</sup> McCue explains Luther's unexpected solution: "The first task is to get people to take the law seriously; and if one is too quick to insist that, of course, no one can obey the law and in any case our salvation does not depend on it, one could make this first task of preaching impossible."<sup>34</sup>

McCue offers a lengthy excerpt from Luther's *Third Antinomian Disputation* to illustrate these truths:

It is true that when we first began this affair we strenuously taught the gospel and also used those words which now the Antinomians use. But the character of that time was vastly different from today. Then the world was more than sufficiently terrified . . . There was thus no need to inculcate or even to teach the law to those consciences which were already oppressed, terrified, miserable, anxious, afflicted. Rather the need was to bring to bear that other part of the preaching of Christ, where he commands also that the forgiveness of sins be preached in his name, so that those who are already sufficiently terrified and in despair would learn not to despair but to flee to the grace and mercy set forth in Christ. But now, when the times are different—altogether different from what they were under the pope, those Antinomians of ours, slick theologians that they are, retain our words, our teaching, that sweet promise from Christ; and what is worse, they want to preach only this, not seeing that people now are not like what they were under the flesh-eating pope. People now have become secure and evil [*securos et malos*]<sup>35</sup>—dishonest, wicked thieves, indeed Epicureans who reverence neither God nor men. And these are the

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<sup>31</sup>McCue, "Luther and the Problem of Popular Preaching," 37.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 41.

people whom they strengthen and comfort with this their doctrine . . . Now indeed these fellows of ours want to preach sermons for a time of the contrite in a time of the secure. This is not rightly to follow the word of God, but to tear apart and lose souls. Our view has been right up to now and ought to remain: If you see people afflicted and contrite, preach Christ to them, preach grace, as much as you can; but not to the secure, the lazy, the licentious, adulterers, and blasphemers. If you don't follow this advice, you will be guilty of their sins.<sup>35</sup>

Although the first principle to preach the law textually takes priority, this principle is not far behind. The preacher must painstakingly exegete the text in order to grasp its meaning. However, he must also understand the spiritual condition of his congregation. Preachers should ask themselves if their churches are filled with individuals “afflicted and contrite,” or are they like “the lazy, the licentious, adulterers, and blasphemers” that filled the pews in Luther’s latter years? The former should hear the grace of God resounding from the pulpit. The latter must hear the law of God in its fullness. The preacher must understand his congregation if he desires to preach the law effectively.

Although this is especially true regarding the law in its second use, it is also true of the third use. The lazy and licentious must hear the accusing force of the second use because their disobedience may be indicative of unbelief. However, they must also hear the commands of the third use so they may genuinely repent and live out the gospel they claim to believe. Carl Trueman agrees, “The gospel of the cross is not the Protestant equivalent of diplomatic immunity. It is the haven of those who know the daily terror of the law, and are acutely aware of the apparent chaos of the world around, and the battle within their own breasts.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Preach the Law Frequently**

In the sermons analyzed herein, the results are compelling: Luther utilized the

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<sup>35</sup>As quoted in McCue, “Luther and the Problem of Popular Preaching,” 37–38.

<sup>36</sup>Carl Trueman, “Theological and Biographical Foundations” (Gheens Lecture, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, September 11, 2012).

law no fewer than five hundred thirty-eight times. In twenty-four total sermons, that amounts to an average of over twenty-two instances of law per sermon.<sup>37</sup> The additional fifty-five sermons analyzed in Appendix Two reveal an even higher average of over thirty-two instances of law per sermon. Luther preached the law whenever he preached. Many preachers mistakenly assume that certain passages are primarily law passages and others are primarily gospel passages. This error often appears in the belief that the Old Testament is concerned primarily with law and the New Testament with gospel. Lohse writes, “Most texts assigned to the law have also a gospel side, just as most texts assigned to the gospel have also a law side.”<sup>38</sup> Luther’s preaching demonstrated this truth. When he preached the law of the Ten Commandments, Luther found gospel in the phrase “I am the Lord, thy God.” When he preached the gospel of the cross, Luther found law in the severity of God’s wrath against sin.<sup>39</sup> Every text contains both law and gospel because every text testifies to the incompleteness of man and God’s provision to make him complete.

Table 20. *Usus legis* in Luther’s preaching

<i>Year</i>	<i>Sermon</i>	<i>First Use</i>	<i>Second Use</i>	<i>Third Use</i>
1510 or 1512	Matthew 7:12	5	9	18
1516	Psalms 19:1	--	12	2

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<sup>37</sup>This dissertation is limited to sixteen sermon *analyses*, not sixteen *sermons*. The analysis of Jude featured two sermons and the analysis of the Invocavit Sermons featured eight, for a total of twenty-four sermons.

<sup>38</sup>Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 269.

<sup>39</sup>A modern reincarnation of the principle that all texts contain both law and gospel appears in Bryan Chapell’s “Fallen Condition Focus.” He says, “The Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) is the mutual human condition (i.e. law) that contemporary believers share with those to whom the text was written that requires the grace (i.e. gospel) of the passage for God’s people to glorify and enjoy him.” Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 48–53.

1517	Matthew 11:25-30	1	11	9
1521	Exodus 25:9-27:18	--	13	6
1522	Invocavit Sermons	10	25	61
1523	Jude	3	27	13
1525	Matthew 11:25-30	1	16	13
1528	Sermon on the Catechism	2	11	28
1530	On the Cross and Suffering	2	6	24
1532	1 Thessalonians 4:13-14	1	2	26
1539	1 Peter 4:7-11	4	15	35
1544	Revelation 12:7-12	2	5	19
1545	Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:4	--	3	9
1545	Hebrews 13:4	5	10	28
1546	Acts 9:1-9	1	1	18
1546	Matthew 11:25-30	1	21	23
<i>Total</i>		38	187	332

Today's preachers must follow the example of Luther and preach the law frequently. Such preaching does not minimize the gospel, but maximizes it. Schuetze affirms, "If we ignore the law in our teaching, the gospel will suffer. As Luther put it, 'If we cast the law aside, we shall not long retain Christ.' Whoever believes that to be faithful to Christ he must preach the gospel of grace to the neglect of the law is failing in his gospel preaching."<sup>40</sup>

Table 20 above illustrates the frequent utilization of the law in Luther's preaching. The law was not an occasional decoration to Luther's homiletic, but a staple component.

### **Preach the Law Diversely**

Faithfully utilizing the law of God in the sermon is not a one-dimensional

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<sup>40</sup>Armin W. Schuetze, "On the Third Use of the Law, Luther's Position in the Antinomian Debate," in *No Other Gospel: Essays in Commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of the Formula of Concord*, ed. Arnold J. Koelpin (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1980), 225.

exercise. Luther's practice reveals a surprising diversity to his preaching of the law. In the sermons analyzed here he utilized the law in its first use thirty-seven times, in its second use one hundred eighty-three times, and in its third use three hundred eighteen times.<sup>41</sup> Contrary to his popular role as the poster boy for pseudo-antinomian sentiment, Luther clearly did not shy away from making ethical demands of his hearers. His imperatives were at times exemplaristic (urging his hearers to follow an example)<sup>42</sup>, at times prescriptive (urging them to behave in a certain manner), and at times exhortative (urging them to persevere in a certain attitude or behavior). Luther commanded his hearers to put off and to put on, to believe and to reject, to stop and to start, to quit and to continue. However, though the weight of the law in his preaching primarily leaned towards the third use, Luther was still multi-dimensional in his approach.

Moreover, Luther's diverse approach to preaching the law was not coincidental. The reformer was suspicious of anything that would hamper or handcuff the preacher's freedom in the pulpit. In 1539, he said this to Agricola in his first thesis *Against the Antinomians*:

I ask you, dear Doctor, to keep the pure doctrine as you have always done. Preach that sinners must be roused to repentance not only by the sweet grace and suffering of Christ, by the message that he died for us, but also by the terrors of the law. For

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<sup>41</sup>See appendix 2 for details from an additional fifty-five sermon analyses.

<sup>42</sup>Luther urged his hearers to follow the examples of Paul (Luther, *LW*, 51: 77), Christ (ibid., 198), Abraham (Luther, *LW*, 58: 106), Adam (ibid., 107), Joseph (ibid., 343), Mary (Luther, *LW*, 58: 434) St. Monica (ibid., 448-449), St. Agatha (ibid.), and himself (ibid., 238), to name a few. In his sermon, *How Christians Should Regard Moses*, Luther mentioned these exemplars as part of the value of the Old Testament: "We read Moses for the beautiful examples of faith, or love, and of the cross, as shown in the fathers, Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and all the rest. From them we should learn to trust in God and love him. In turn there are also examples of the godless, how God does not pardon the unfaith of the unbelieving; how he can punish Cain, Ishmael, Esau, the whole world in the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc. Examples like these are necessary. For although I am not Cain, yet if I should act like Cain, I will receive the same punishment as Cain. Nowhere else do we find such fine examples of both faith and unfaith" (Luther, *LW*, 35: 173).

they are wrong in maintaining that one must follow only one method of preaching repentance, namely to point to Christ's suffering on our behalf, claiming as they do that Christendom might otherwise become confused and be at a loss to know which is the true and only way. No, one must preach in all sorts of ways—God's threats, his promises, his punishment, his help, and anything else—in order that we may be brought to repentance.<sup>43</sup>

A clear example of Luther's diverse approach to preaching the law is visible in his treatment of Matthew 11:25-30. In three separate sermons on the same text, his use of the law was never the same, as demonstrated by Figure 23 below. In his 1517 sermon, he employed the first use once, the second use 11 times, and the third use 9 times. In 1525, the first use appeared once, the second use 16 times, and the third use 13 times. In 1546, he again utilized the first use just once, but on this occasion, he devoted 21 statements to the second use and 23 for the third.

Luther's practice should liberate the preacher to "preach in all sorts of ways" to bring the sinner to repentance and faith. Indeed, the modern preacher should be leery of any legalistic attempts to restrict or minimize the preacher's impact in the pulpit. Luther's approach allows for diverse manifestations of law in the pulpit.

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<sup>43</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 47: *The Christian in Society IV*, ed. Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 111–12.

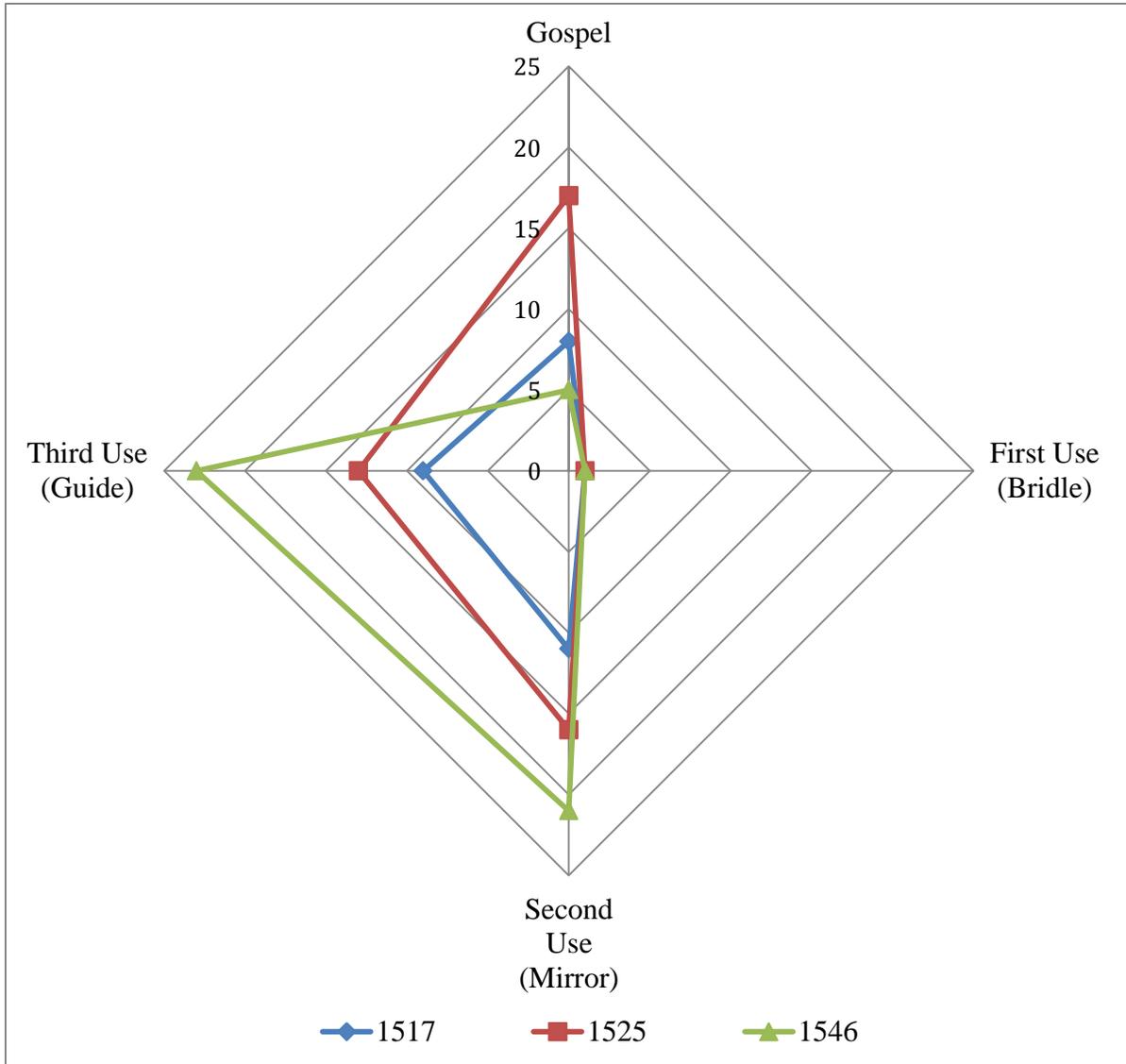


Figure 23. *Usus legis* in Matthew 11:25-30

### Preach the Law Explicitly

Luther did not shy away from preaching against specific sins in his congregation. He condemned loveless inaction in his sermon on Matthew 7:12.<sup>44</sup> He

<sup>44</sup>*Luther's Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 11.

exposed the folly of indulgences in his 1517 sermon on Matthew 11.<sup>45</sup> He rejected the lopsided ethics of the church in his sermon on Exodus 25:9-27:18.<sup>46</sup> He excoriated the sham of relics in his sermon on Acts 9. In his *Invocavit Sermons*, he outlined clear, practical commands on the biblical execution of reform.<sup>47</sup> He issued firm admonitions for parenting in his first sermon on the catechism.<sup>48</sup> In his sermon from Hebrews 13:4, he told the single to pursue marriage, the married to remain faithful, and the fornicating to repent.<sup>49</sup> He showed his hearers how to suffer well in his sermon *On the Cross and Suffering*.<sup>50</sup> In his sermon on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, he taught them how to grieve.<sup>51</sup>

These are no isolated incidents. Luther regularly preached the law explicitly to his congregation. In a 1545 sermon on Galatians 5:16-24, he condemned his people for failing to pay their pastors.<sup>52</sup> In a 1528 sermon on the Ten Commandments, he rebuked those who were overcharging their clients.<sup>53</sup> In a 1532 sermon, he excoriated the antinomians for sermons that were nothing but "loose, lazy, and cold gibble-gabble."<sup>54</sup> In a 1539 sermon on 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7, Luther lashed out against sins like theft, fornication, and adultery. He then defended this explicit proclamation of the law by reminding his congregation that the gospel itself was at stake:

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<sup>45</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 31.

<sup>46</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, *The Christian in Society I*, ed. James Atkinson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 236–37.

<sup>47</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 69–100.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 357–67.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 197–208.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 231–43.

<sup>52</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 288.

<sup>53</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 156.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 274.

The gasbags and honey-sweet preachers object to this. [But a true preacher] must also preach sharply, [pointing out what will happen] if we do not abstain from sin. . . . Such [honeyed] preaching is not for you. Christ died for those who seek to have their sins forgiven, cease committing them, and then become daily more perfect. Besides, the sweet sermon is vain, wasted words, because those who hear it say, “Indeed, this is a cheerful preacher, [for] he does not add: ‘If you are in sin, you will be damned, etc.’” . . . People want to have such [sweet] preachers today. First, let the terror of judgment be set before them so that they might ponder what they have received from Christ, and then abstain from transgressions. . . . If this is preached, they say, “You will frighten them [with your harshness].” But Christ did not die to no purpose, which is what happens if you remain in your sins.<sup>55</sup>

Preachers today are free to preach the law explicitly; such sermons are not anti-Christian. Even some more moderate proponents of redemptive-historical preaching recognize the need for explicit imperatives. Doriani explains,

One *can* preach an effective sermon without uttering commands.

Nonetheless, “We need strength, not advice” is a false dichotomy, spawned by the ingrown chattering of the cognitive religious crowd. *Theologians* may know all they need, but they are long habituated to biblical laws and ethics. Because they are immersed in biblical law, they are free to underestimate the law. *In theory*, Christians might only need to follow the Spirit’s leading, but life refutes the theory. Not all Christians who want to obey know how to do it. If a renewed mind were a sufficient guide to behavior, why does Paul still propound commands? . . . Thus, *however sophisticated we are, there is a time to tell people what to do*. Whoever denies this is wiser than Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles, none of whom hesitated to command.<sup>56</sup>

Luther would likely agree: “No one understands the law unless it be explained to him.”<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, preachers must labor, explicitly explaining the law of God to their people.

### **Preach the Law Intentionally**

Luther preached the law intentionally to his congregation. During the antinomian controversy, he faced recurring accusations of neglecting the law, which he steadfastly denied. In his 1539 thesis *Against the Antinomians*, he responded by highlighting the intentionality with which he proclaimed the Ten Commandments in

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<sup>55</sup>Luther, *LW*, 58: 21–22.

<sup>56</sup>Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 263.

<sup>57</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 22.

Wittenberg:

It is most surprising to me that anyone can claim that I reject the law or the Ten Commandments, since there is available, in more than one edition, my exposition of the Ten Commandments, which furthermore are daily preached and practiced in our churches. . . . Furthermore, the commandments are sung in two versions, as well as painted, printed, carved, and recited by the children morning, noon, and night.<sup>58</sup>

Historical evidence supports Luther's defense that the commandments were vital to the Wittenberg congregation. He preached through the Ten Commandments three times in 1528 alone. On November 29 that year, he explained the importance of these sermons:

It has hitherto been our custom to teach the elements and fundamentals of Christian knowledge and life four times each year and we have therefore arranged to preach on these things for two weeks in each quarter, four days a week at two o'clock in the afternoon. Because these matters are highly necessary, I faithfully admonish you to assemble at the designated time with your families. Do not allow yourself to be kept away by your work or trade and do not complain that you will suffer loss if for once you interrupt your work for an hour. Remember how much freedom the gospel has given to you, so that now you are not obliged to observe innumerable holy days and can pursue your work.<sup>59</sup>

It is noteworthy to consider how Luther connected the importance of preaching the law intentionally with the reality of the gospel. Christ's atoning work does not free his people *from* obedience the law; it frees them *for* obedience to the law. Elsewhere he stated, "The law should be interpreted and preached, in order both that love for every man may rightly proceed from a pure heart for God's sake and that the conscience may stand before the world."<sup>60</sup>

Luther's practical understanding of the law permeated his intentional exposition of the Ten Commandments. First, Luther believed the preacher should explain the law. Every sermon began with a clear explanation of the law. The faithful preacher

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<sup>58</sup>Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. William R. Russell and Timothy F. Lull, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 177.

<sup>59</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 135.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 274.

must never assume that a congregation already understands the law of God; he should carefully explain what God expects of all people. Second, Luther believed the preacher should apply the law. His sermons on the Decalogue contained practical application for his people. Luther refused to speak in mere generalities, but sought to drive the law into the everyday lives of his hearers. Third, Luther believed the people of God should obey the law. He undoubtedly believed that the law instructed the Christian how to live his life. Elsewhere he stated, “You must use the Ten Commandments to teach people how they must live in this life.”<sup>61</sup>

At the outset of the Reformation, the Ten Commandments were essential tools in the Christian education of children and adults alike. Sadly, a similar emphasis on the law of God is absent in many churches today. Perhaps many preachers have so lost confidence in the gospel that they now avoid the law. Kevin DeYoung expressed similar concerns in a popular sermon: “The world looks at us and the world is very concerned that you and I might be homophobic. I think God is much more concerned that you and I might be *nomophobic*—afraid of the law.”<sup>62</sup> Luther’s intentional handling of the law should encourage today’s preacher to develop a deliberate plan to proclaim the law from his own pulpit.

### **Preach the Law Dialectically**

This section assumes that law is a necessary component of Christian (indeed, Christ-centered) preaching. This is especially essential given the latent *nomophobia* present in many evangelical pulpits. However, the prominence given to law here could easily swing the pendulum in the opposite direction, resulting in a tragic neglect of the

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<sup>61</sup>Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils*, vol. 3, ed. Eugene F. A. Klug, trans. Eugene F. A. Klug et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 633.

<sup>62</sup>Kevin DeYoung, *Spirit-Powered, Gospel-Driven, Faith-Fueled Effort* (Louisville, KY, 2012).

gospel in Christian preaching. Such an overreaction would undermine all of Luther's labors. In his proclamation of the gospel, he did not fail to present the law. In his presentation of the law, he did not fail to proclaim the gospel. Luther preached the law dialectically with the gospel. As Carl Braaten summarizes, "The law/gospel distinction is the classical Lutheran homiletical principle."<sup>63</sup>

Luther preached the law in light of the gospel because he had a profound ability to recognize the dialectical nature of law and gospel. He demonstrated this exceptional skill in a sermon preached in 1537 on Matthew 22:34-40.<sup>64</sup> First, Luther employed the second use to expose man's utter inability to satisfy God's standard of righteousness. Luther stated, "The law stands there at all times, regards us as guilty, drives us and demands that we should be upright and obedient to God."<sup>65</sup> Elsewhere he states, "Because I am to love God with my whole heart and my neighbor as myself, and I do not do it. So I must be condemned."<sup>66</sup>

After he preached the law to condemn the sinner, Luther preached the provision God made in the gospel. In Christ, the gospel completes the sinner by providing the obedience the law demands and the substitute man's disobedience requires. Christ

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<sup>63</sup>Carl E. Braaten, *Justification: The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 148.

<sup>64</sup>But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 22:34-40).

<sup>65</sup>Martin Luther, "The Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel: A Sermon by Martin Luther January 1, 1532," trans. Willard L. Burce, *Concordia Journal* 18 (1992): 153-63.

<sup>66</sup>As quoted in Robert Kolb, "'The Noblest Skill in the Christian Church': Luther's Sermons on the Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 71 (2007): 315.

came to this earth “because we could not keep the law. It was impossible for our nature.”<sup>67</sup> However, Christ’s work involves more than fulfilling the law in the sinner’s stead. He also bears the punishment for sin. Luther elaborated, “He has taken our sin and shame upon himself—but in God’s sight he is the mercy seat, without sin and shame, pure virtue and honor.”<sup>68</sup>

Second, Luther employed the law as mirror to remind the saint that he continues to fall short of God’s standard of perfection. The law continues to accuse the saints of God, even after conversion. Luther admitted, “When I measure my life against the law, I see and feel all the time its opposite in my life.”<sup>69</sup> The Christian remains incomplete because he continues to fall short of God’s standard. The law continues to damn the Christian, for he cannot obey the law of God perfectly as God requires. Preaching the law in this manner combats hypocrisy in the Christian’s life.

After Luther preached the law to condemn the saint, he once again preached the provision in the gospel. The gospel reminds the saint that Christ’s life and death provide the perfection the law requires. One should preach the gospel to remind saints that their status rests not in their obedience, but in Christ. Luther continued, “[Christ] is the only human being who could keep and fulfill the law, for he shared human nature with all other people, but without the same guilt, apart from sin and God’s wrath.”<sup>70</sup> Therefore, Luther preached both law and gospel to the Christian to remind him continually that his righteousness is a gift, given by God in Christ.

Finally, Luther preached the law to remind the saint of his obligation to live according to his status. He preached the law in its third use to reveal man’s

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<sup>67</sup>Kolb, "The Noblest Skill," 315.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 316.

<sup>69</sup>As cited in *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 317.

incompleteness by commanding him to act or think contrary to what he is doing presently. Many pulpits lack this final component of preaching the law. It is not enough to preach the law simply to reveal the utter hopelessness of man; the preacher must also present the law as a schoolmaster to educate the believer in this life. Luther elucidated, “He gives us the Holy Spirit, that we may follow him and begin to suppress and kill sin as long as we come to him and become like him, without sin and in complete righteousness.”<sup>71</sup> Luther clearly taught his people the importance of practical righteousness in daily living, a practical righteousness that cannot exist apart from preaching the law.

After preaching the law to educate the saint, Luther concluded by reminding his hearers of the gospel. It is true that the law makes explicit commands that the believer must obey. However, obedience to those commands cannot occur apart from the gospel. He concluded,

[Christ] not only covers and protects us, but he also wants to nourish and feed us as the hen nourishes and feeds her chicks. That is, he wants to give us the Holy Spirit and the strength to begin to love God and keep his commandments. When Christ demanded that the man give up everything to follow him (Matt. 19:16-25), he was saying that keeping God’s commandments involves knowing and having Christ.<sup>72</sup>

Luther's robust law-gospel dialectic is pictured in Figure 24 below. Luther preached the law to reveal the utter inability of sinners, usually employing the second use. He then preached the gospel to provide the perfection that the law requires. In order to combat laziness and licentiousness among his hearers, Luther preached the law to remind saints of their continued transgression of God's righteous standard. He primarily employed the accusatory second use here. Luther then preached the gospel to remind his hearers of their status in Christ. However, despite his new standing in Christ, the saint was still required to live according to his status. Here Luther employed the third use to

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<sup>71</sup>Kolb, "The Noblest Skill," 317.

<sup>72</sup>As cited in *ibid.*, 316.

compel his hearers to lives of obedience. He then preached the gospel to remind his hearers of their need for the Spirit to live as Christ commanded. When Luther discerned a laxity among his hearers, he often employed the first use to threaten those who refused to obey.

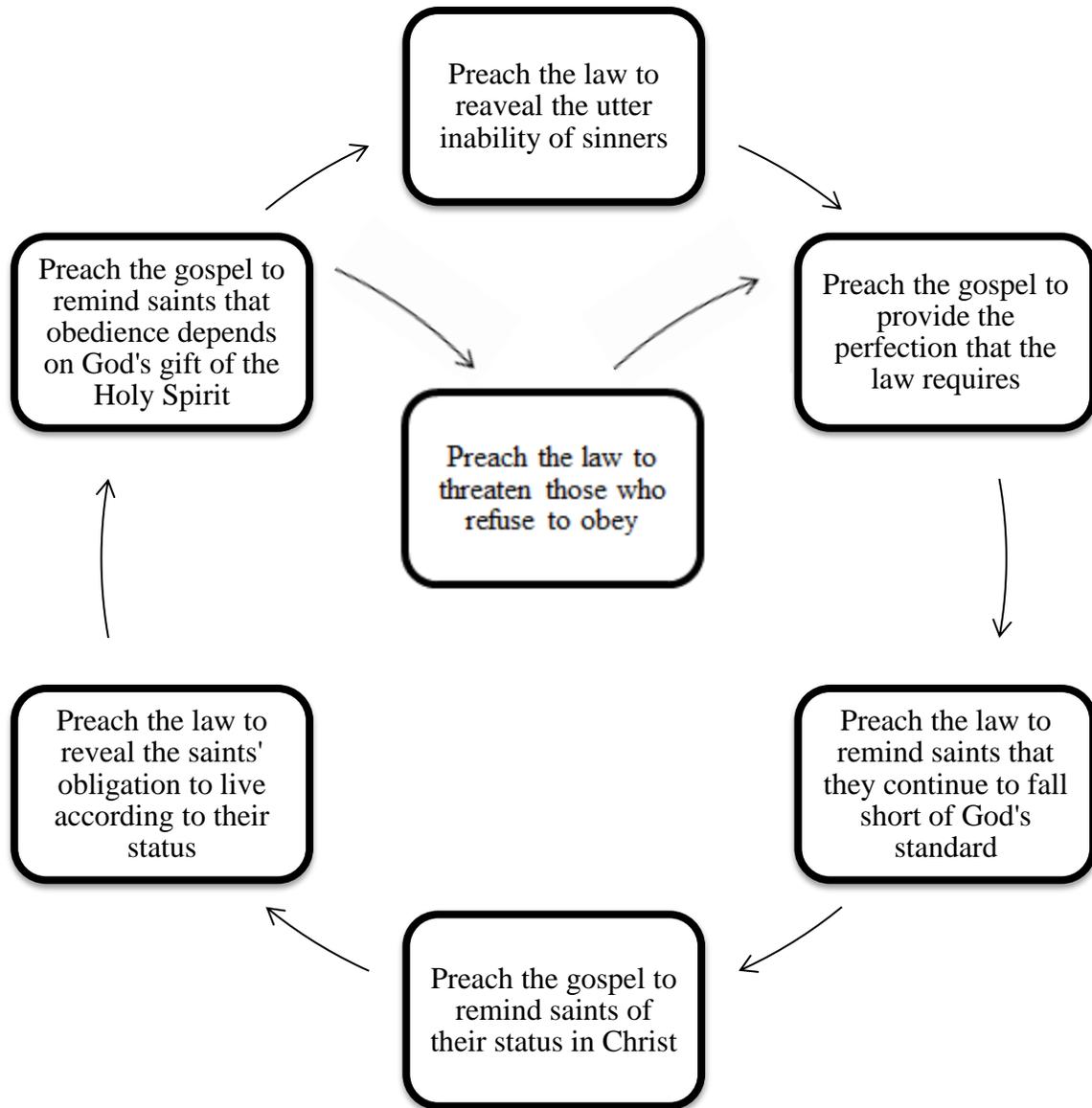


Figure 24. Preaching law and gospel dialectically

Many redemptive-historical preachers would likely applaud such a comprehensive and robust strategy to preach law and gospel in the sermon. Nevertheless, as the analyses herein have shown, Luther did not employ this dialectic in the same way, or with equal force, in every sermon. On the contrary, he seemed perfectly content to spread out the dialectic among multiple sermons. He strove to preach in such a way that his entire preaching ministry was characterized by the right handling of law and gospel, even if individual sermons seemed to reveal only a few pieces of the puzzle.

### **Preach the Law Boldly**

One of the central claims of redemptive-historical preaching is the plea for gospel exceptionalism. The Christian sermon is not Christian if the unique and exceptional claims of the gospel remain implicit. In other words, the Christian sermon must be distinctively different from the sermon preached in a synagogue, a mosque, or a kingdom hall. Every sermon must articulate clearly and carefully the central, unique claims of Christianity. Few were more passionate about Christian doctrine than Luther. Few held the gospel in higher esteem than he did. After all, how many preachers or theologians today would walk away from Marburg questioning Zwingli's salvation the way Luther did? Nevertheless, despite this indomitable passion for the priority of the gospel, he apparently did not find it necessary to explicate the uniqueness of the Christian gospel in every individual sermon.

In his sermon on Hebrews 13:4, he carefully and clearly presented a Christian theology of marriage.<sup>73</sup> None should disregard holy matrimony, not the marriage-forbidding legalists on the right or the sexually licentious on the left. The legalists should abandon their legalism and pursue marriage. The licentious should repent. Those who are

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<sup>73</sup>"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous" (Heb 13:4).

faithfully married must labor to remain faithful, while properly raising the children from that union. Yet Luther did not hold a gospel-less view of marriage. His entire theology of marriage was resultant from and consistent with his theology of justification by faith. The gospel is not absent from this sermon, it is merely implicit. Therein lies the problem; the redemptive-historical school provides little room for theological implicitness.

Luther's approach to gospel-centered sermons was different. The analyses herein reveal a frequent failure to articulate the gospel explicitly in every sermon. Some might contend that Luther's gospel is too small. After all, would not a hearty view of the gospel compel the preacher to explicate its truths at every opportunity? Luther saw things differently. He preached this way, not because his gospel was too small, but because his gospel was infinitely big—so big, in fact, that it is able to do its work even when its claims are implicit. Furthermore, it was not a low view of Scripture that led Luther to preach in this way. On the contrary, he valued the Word of God so highly that he was thoroughly content to preach the text and trust God to do the work. In other words, Luther's total confidence in the gospel enabled him to preach the law boldly.

Luther firmly believed that the Evangel was powerless until the *Cacangelium*—the bad news—had done its work. The law must be preached or the gospel will have no effect. Luther's view of the gospel was so expansive that even when its truths were implied, its power remained undiminished. For Luther, the goal of the sermon was not merely to speak accurate words *for* God but to speak in an accurate *manner*. If God speaks through the languages of law and gospel, the preacher must rightly employ those languages in the pulpit. Gerhard Forde opines, "The difference between 'old law' and 'new law (gospel)' is a difference in *speaking*."<sup>74</sup> He continues, "Law and gospel, as Luther understood them, are more a matter of modes of speech and

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<sup>74</sup>Gerhard O. Forde, "Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic," *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 240. Emphasis original.

ways of preaching than of difference in content between Old and New Testaments.”<sup>75</sup>

The point of Luther's sermons was to communicate law and gospel accurately to his people.

The expositional imbalance of gospel *exceptionalism* finds remedy in Luther's gospel *expansiveness*. For Luther, preaching the law was essential because it clarified the gospel. The preacher can preach the law boldly because faithfully and effectively preaching the law *is* preaching Christ. Regardless of which use of the law is employed, Christ is preached when the law is preached because Christ fulfilled the law and died for the sinner who is helpless to meet its demands. Luther made this connection in his words to Agricola in the *First Antinomian Disputation*:

How can one know what sin is without the law and conscience? And how will we learn what Christ is, what he did for us, if we do not know what the law is that he fulfilled for us and what sin is, for which he made satisfaction? And even if we did not require the law for ourselves, or if we could tear it out of our hearts (which is impossible), we would have to *preach it for Christ's sake*, as is done and as has to be done, so that we might know what he did and what he suffered for us. For who could know what and why Christ suffered for us without knowing what sin or law is? Therefore *the law must be preached wherever Christ is to be preached*, even if the word “law” is not mentioned, so that the conscience is nevertheless frightened by the law when it hears that Christ had to fulfill the law for us at so great a price. Why, then, should one wish to abolish the law, which cannot be abolished, yes, which is only intensified by such an attempt? For the law terrifies me more when I hear that Christ, the Son of God, had to fulfill it for me than it would were it preached to me without the mention of Christ and of such great torment suffered by God's Son, but were accompanied only by threats. For in the Son of God I behold the wrath of God *in* action, while the law of God shows it to me with words and with lesser deeds.<sup>76</sup>

Luther's logic is clear. First, the law clarifies the gospel by highlighting the wretchedness of sin. Without clearly preaching the law to reveal man's incompleteness, God's provision in Christ to make man complete will lose its power. Believers and unbelievers alike must hear God's standard preached if they would understand how drastically they fall short. Second, the law clarifies the gospel by highlighting the work of

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<sup>75</sup>Forde, “Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic,” 240.

<sup>76</sup>Luther, *LW*, 47: 113. Emphasis added.

Christ.<sup>77</sup> Luther addressed both Christ's obedience and his sacrifice. Lawless preaching drains Christ's obedience to the law of its meaning. Furthermore, lawless preaching diminishes Christ's sacrifice to pay for man's disobedience. Third, the law clarifies the gospel by explaining the wrath of God. Luther stated, "In the Son of God I behold the wrath of God in action, while the law of God shows it to me with words and with lesser deeds."<sup>78</sup> The cross illustrates the wrath of God and the law describes why that wrath is necessary.

Finally, Luther argued, "even if we did not require the law for ourselves . . . we would have to preach it for Christ's sake."<sup>79</sup> Luther's remarks imply that Christians *do* "require the law" for themselves. Luther reiterated that the function of the law is not restricted to revealing man's incompleteness to satisfy God's standard of righteousness. The law also reveals man's incompleteness by commanding him to act or think contrary to what he is doing presently. In some sense, the law still binds the Christian. How does this function of the law clarify the gospel? The law clarifies the gospel by revealing how gospel people should live.

Luther preached the law to clarify the gospel. He rightly understood that without the law the good news of the gospel is not good at all. Lohse encapsulates the crux of this argument, "The law can only fulfill its God-intended function when seen in constant contrast with the gospel, just as the gospel is properly preached only in constant contrast to the law."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Luther considered the minimization of Christ's saving work as the tragic failure of antinomianism: "It is apparent from this that the devil's purpose in this fanaticism is not to remove the law but to remove Christ, the fulfiller of the law." Luther, *LW*, 47: 110.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup>Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 269.

Preachers today should not be afraid or ashamed to preach the law of God. After all, faithfully preaching the law is one of the ways the preacher faithfully preaches Christ. Luther believed that law and gospel are the two languages with which God speaks to his people, which testify of Christ, the Eternal Word. Many redemptive-historical homileticians have unwittingly clamped one side of God's mouth shut while holding up a megaphone to the other. However, the preacher is free to proclaim the law in a robust manner, unlike this one-dimensional approach. If God speaks in the two languages of law and gospel, preachers must painstakingly strive for fluency in both languages. Preaching the law accurately is not sub-Christian, but Christ-centered.

### Summary

Several objections to the claims in this chapter should be considered. First, some might argue that Luther's use of the law is essentially congruent with redemptive-historical preaching. After all, although Luther failed to issue a gospel caveat after every instance of law, he usually featured the gospel (albeit often implicitly) in every sermon. In other words, many might deem it sufficient to present some measure of gospel truth in a law-filled sermon, not necessarily after every proclamation of law. However, when must preachers issue these gospel caveats? Must they appear in the sermon's conclusion, or may the preacher mention them at the outset? Must they appear after the issuing of law, or can the order be reversed?

RH literature is unclear on the recommended frequency and proximity of these gospel caveats. Nevertheless, several remarks suggest they should appear quickly and clearly. In his analysis of Calvin's homiletic, Greidanus criticizes the reformer for attaching application to the text without first mediating it through Christ, leading to a "lack of unity" that "blurs the Christ-centered focus."<sup>81</sup> More telling is Goldsworthy's

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<sup>81</sup>Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 150-51.

argument:

To say what we should be or do and not link it with a *clear* exposition of what God has done about our failure to be or do perfectly as he wills is to reject the grace of God and to lead people to lust after self-help and self-improvement in a way that, to call a spade a spade, is godless.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, while urging caution when preaching Christ as exemplar, Chapell writes, "Neither do we help others by encouraging them to be like Jesus if we do not *simultaneously* remind them that his standards are always beyond them, apart from his enabling grace."<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, Figure 25 below reveals Edmund Clowney's understanding that all application (our preaching) must be clearly mediated through its gospel fulfillment in Christ.<sup>84</sup>

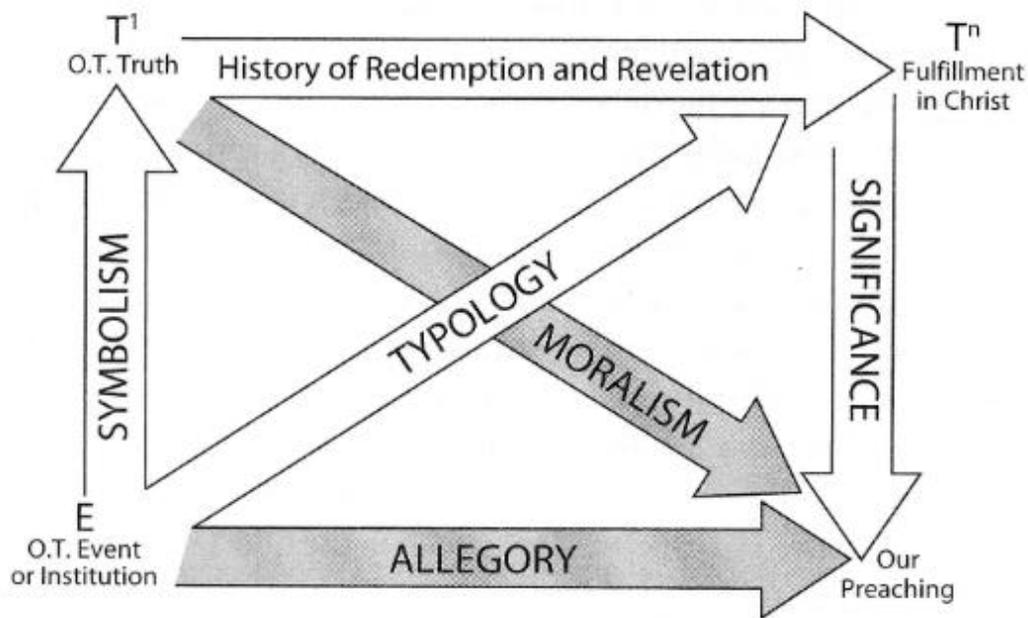


Figure 25. Edmund Clowney's diagram on preaching Christ

<sup>82</sup>Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 119. Emphasis added.

<sup>83</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 290. Emphasis added.

<sup>84</sup>Diagram from Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 32.

The weight of these remarks seems to indicate a desire for a high frequency of gospel caveats in close proximity to their legal counterparts. Luther's *dispositio* reveals nothing if not the lack of a prescribed pattern. He occasionally qualifies his legal imperatives with gospel indicatives, but more frequently does not. Are the former sermons acceptable and the latter sub-Christian? Or can Luther be evaluated in light of his entire pulpit ministry, which features an undeniable abundance of gospel?

Furthermore, a careful glance at many of the gospel promises Luther does highlight reveal a lack of clarity. For example, in his sermon on Hebrews 13:4, Luther regularly employs the third use to promote marriage, fidelity, and a biblical understanding of parenting. He issued four clear imperatives: fornicators must "stop," "repent," "enter into marriage," and "live a married and godly life."<sup>85</sup> A casual look at this sermon may suggest redemptive-historical compliance, especially considering the multiple gospel promises contained therein. Nevertheless, despite the multiple issuances of gospel promises, they possess no clear connection to the aforementioned imperatives. He did not remind his hearers that their obedience could not merit God's favor, nor did he compel them to respond in light of the gospel. Instead, he simply told them that the one who responded in this way "will be doing the right and Christian thing."<sup>86</sup>

Second, some might object to the nomenclature employed in this study. The imperatives laced throughout Luther's sermons are not law, but *commandments*.<sup>87</sup> These commandments are fundamentally different from the theological category *law*. The law

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<sup>85</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 360, 364.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>87</sup>See Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 275; Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 157–58. See also Stuempfle, who speaks of "the call to obedience" rather than referring to the third use as "commandments." Herman G. Stuempfle Jr., *Preaching Law and Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 62–75.

always accuses and kills, therefore referring to law as a guide is "a *category* mistake."<sup>88</sup> Those who propose this distinction between law and commandment contend that *commandments* are imperatives grounded in the indicatives of the gospel. Nevertheless, the artificial distinction between law and commandments only works when law is defined apart from its content, something which Luther himself refused to do.

Furthermore, even if the above examples of the third use were not law, but merely "commandments," Luther's preaching remains non-compliant. Those who advocate a distinction between commandments and law believe imperatives must be firmly entrenched in gospel indicatives. In a noble effort to avoid works-righteousness and maximize the gospel, these sermons may offer sterilized imperatives, heavily surrounded by a host of gospel caveats. Such impotent imperatives are largely absent from Luther's preaching. While Luther did articulate gospel indicatives, he apparently saw no need to follow every proclamation of law with a gospel caveat.

In his fourth *Invocavit* sermon, Luther brilliantly rejected the radical reformers' tendencies to throw out the baby with the proverbial bathwater. His sarcastic rebuke is still relevant today:

We must, therefore, be on our guard, for the devil, through his apostles, is after us with all his craft and cunning. Now, although it is true and no one can deny that the images are evil because they are abused, nevertheless we must not on that account reject them, nor condemn anything because it is abused. This would result in utter confusion. God has commanded us in Deut. 4 not to lift up our eyes to the sun, etc., that we may not worship them, for they are created to serve all nations. But there are many people who worship the sun and the stars. Therefore we propose to rush in and pull the sun and stars from the skies. No, we had better let it be. Again, wine and women bring many a man to misery and make a fool out of him; so we kill all the women and pour out all the wine. Again, gold and silver cause much evil, so we condemn them. Indeed, if we want to drive away our worst enemy, the one who does us the most harm, we shall have to kill ourselves, for we have no greater enemy than our own heart.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Tullian Tchividjian, "Luther On Law," The Gospel Coalition, *Liberate* (September 12, 2011), <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tullian/2011/09/12/luther-on-law/>. This disagreement illustrates the fundamental importance of properly defining the theological term *law*.

<sup>89</sup>Luther, *LW*, 51: 85.

Christian history is replete with preachers who have damaged the pulpit. It is true that preachers can abuse the imperatives of Scripture, turning Christianity into a legalistic system of salvation by works. However, Martin Luther was not such a preacher, nor are the countless others who follow in his tradition. The redemptive-historical tendency to cure moralism in the pulpit by minimizing the law is not a legitimate remedy. It would be just as foolish to try to remedy moralism by abandoning the pulpit altogether.

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION

This dissertation has contended that the law-gospel paradigm in Luther's Christ-centered homiletic may function as a corrective to the potential overreach among redemptive-historical exclusivists. Bryan Chapell's "Deadly Be's" arose as a clear set of redemptive-historical standards by which to measure the reformer's preaching. The consistent agreement among RHP scholars solidified the selection. Luther's undeniable christocentrism solidified his relevance to test the exclusivistic leanings of the RH school. The extended analysis of twenty-four sermons confirmed the suspicions, revealing a consistent failure to satisfy the redemptive-historical criteria for Christ-centered legitimacy.

#### **Three Alternatives**

The results of these findings suggest one of three alternatives. Perhaps the narrow sermon selection from such a broad preaching corpus has skewed the data. Maybe a more comprehensive analysis of Luther's preaching would yield a more compliant Christ-centeredness. However, the additional fifty-five analyses in Appendix Two from sermons in *Luther's Works* yield findings consistent with the claims herein. It is certainly possible that the sermons selected by scholars to represent the best of Luther's preaching are actually uncharacteristic of his normal homiletic, but it seems unlikely. Furthermore, some of the reformer's most recognizable and historically important sermons are included herein. Therefore, simply rejecting this analysis out of hand due to insufficient scope seems unwarranted.

Alternatively, perhaps Luther really was not a Christ-centered preacher. Those

desirous to retain the exclusivistic tendencies characteristic of the redemptive-historical homiletic can accept the findings herein and deal with the consequences. With an unyielding grasp on the benefits of RHP, some may simply shrug and move on. Again, this approach seems unwise. Luther has rightfully earned universal recognition as one of the most Christ-centered preachers in Christian history.<sup>1</sup> If a preacher like Luther cannot retain his reputation for Christ-centeredness, who can survive? The homiletician with an obstinate adherence to redemptive-historical exclusivity may soon find himself in the dangerous position of demonizing the majority of preachers from the past two thousand years.<sup>2</sup>

The most tenable response to the findings herein is to revisit the exclusivism that has plagued the RH school since its inception. The issue is not the legitimacy of the homiletic, but its exclusivistic claims and subsequent name-calling for noncompliance. These labels include "legalistic," "moralistic," "atomistic," "godless," "Christ-denying," "demonic," "anti-Christian," and "tool[s] of satanic deception." Their most common designation is not *sub-optimal* or *sub-par*, but *sub-Christian*.

### **Christ-Centered Legalism?**

How then might RH theorists respond? A noble start would be to scale back

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to suggest that all of Luther's Christ-centered methods are worthy of imitation. For instance, the occasional reoccurrence of allegorical interpretation is an unhelpful way to preach Christ. Nevertheless, Luther's lingering bent for allegory is tangential to his law-gospel paradigm, not essential to it. In other words, even though he sometimes employed questionable methods to promote Christ in his preaching, the homiletician need not throw out the homiletical baby with the allegorical bathwater.

<sup>2</sup>The point here is not to lionize every preacher from church history with blind deference. Some homiletics *should* be opposed, such as the social gospel, the prosperity gospel, the allegorical hermeneutic, and others. Nevertheless, history is replete with faithful preachers who would fall outside the parameters of Christ-centered legitimacy. Modern preachers should warily hurl sub-Christian epithets at the giants upon whose shoulders they stand.

the language employed to describe sermons and preachers who fail to say rightly the redemptive-historical shibboleth.<sup>3</sup> Is it not possible to *warn* preachers of the dangers of legalistic preaching without haphazardly dismissing opposing viewpoints as intrinsically legalistic? Moreover, in their excoriating rebukes of so-called legalistic preaching, some redemptive-historical scholars are in danger of falling prey to a form of legalism themselves. This potential for legalism is not the atomistic moralism that was initially condemned, but a Christ-centered legalism resulting in heavy-laden preachers burdened by an ever-growing list of Christ-centered do's and don'ts.

Is the designation “Christ-centered legalism” too harsh? Perhaps, but upon closer examination the description may seem more fitting. A comprehensive definition for legalism—although incredibly elusive—is essential to properly framing the debate. Everyone knows legalism is bad, but few agree on what legalism means.<sup>4</sup> Conventional wisdom consistently couples legalism with the doctrine of justification, also called “soteriological legalism.”<sup>5</sup> Understood this way, legalism is any attempt to “attain or

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<sup>3</sup>Perhaps a graduated critique of sermons that fail to comply with RHP would be a more healthy approach. Most of the language used to critique non-conformist sermons is overly brusque. Rather than referring to all these sermons as “sub-Christian” or worse, could RHP advocates not adopt a more nuanced approach? Some sermons certainly are “sub-Christian” and should be labeled as such. But if everything is sub-Christian then nothing is.

<sup>4</sup>“No one wants to be labeled a legalist. It is a resoundingly negative and is used in polemics solely of others, never of oneself. The accused, of course, reject the label.” Kent Yinger, “Defining Legalism,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 46, no. 1 (2008): 91–108. Bernard Jackson offers no fewer than six senses of “legalism.” Bernard S. Jackson, “Legalism,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): 4-17.

<sup>5</sup>Jackson explains that “The term ‘legalist’ appears to have been coined by Edward Fisher, in the tract *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645), to designate one who ‘bringeth the law into the case of justification’” Jackson, “Legalism,” 5. Popular definitions largely agree: “A legalist is anyone who behaves as if they can earn God’s forgiveness through personal performance.” C. J. Mahaney, *Living the Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 2006), 112.

maintain” justification through human effort.<sup>6</sup> If this popular definition holds, true legalists are a rare breed in evangelicalism. Mark Jones explains,

Many understand “legalism” as salvation by works, which is only partly true. This way of understanding the concept ends up missing the more subtle forms of legalistic thinking that creep into our thinking. If antinomianism is understood simply as all indicatives without imperatives, and legalism simply as all imperatives without indicatives, then there have been very few true antinomians or true legalists in the Christian tradition.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, the “legalist” epithet is pervasive throughout redemptive-historical literature.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, their practical use of the term belies a definition too closely affiliated with the doctrine of justification. When RHP scholars employ the “legalistic” moniker, they primarily refer to perceived errors regarding sanctification, not justification.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, a more appropriate definition is necessary. Sam Storms offers a helpful alternative: “Legalism is the tendency to regard as divine law things that God has neither required nor forbidden in Scripture, and the corresponding inclination to look with suspicion on others for their failure or refusal to conform.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>J.W. Hendryx, “Legalism,” *Monergism.com*, accessed April 27, 2015, <http://www.monergism.com/taxonomy/term/30751/all>.

<sup>7</sup>Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology’s Unwelcome Guest?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 123–24.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 59, 119, 124, 151; Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 20, 170, 287–89, 324; Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 326; David Edward Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 87.

<sup>9</sup>For example, Chapell characterizes legalistic preaching as “futile harangues for human striving.” Nevertheless, he is doubtlessly not referring to pulpit pleas for increased effort towards justification (if that were true, this would not be “well-intended... evangelical preaching,” but damnable heresy). These legalistic “harangues” are pulpit pleas regarding sanctification. Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching*, 20.

<sup>10</sup>Sam Storms, *Tough Topics: Biblical Answers to 25 Challenging Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 311. Storms prefers this definition over against

With this definition in view, the ironic potential for legalism in redemptive-historical circles is more visible. Nevertheless, this dissertation has not argued that RHP is intrinsically legalistic. However, the exclusivistic claims on the subject have saddled the pulpit with a heavy yoke. These gospel-fueled preaching methods often burden the preacher with homiletical law—an ironic decree to preach the gospel, or else! At issue here, to borrow from Storms, is the redemptive-historical potential to regard as divine law homiletical methods that God has not required in Scripture, and the corresponding inclination to look with suspicion on other sermons or preachers for their failure or refusal to conform.

Despite the potential for a legalistic articulation of its homiletic, the Christ-centered sermons of RH advocates are not intrinsically legalistic. Neither should they be renounced as sub-Christian or worse. They are, more often than not, faithful expositions of the Word of God. Preachers convinced of RHP should retain its approach, but reject its exclusivistic leanings. Those who remain unconvinced of RHP should be free *from* derogatory accusations, and free *to* learn from their brothers even when they disagree with their methods.

### **Areas for Further Study**

This dissertation will not be the final word on any of its intersecting issues. Further study is necessary to advance the discussion in several areas for the glory of God and the good of the pulpit. First, further historical study should test the faithfulness of other Christian preachers from the past by the Christ-centered metrics of the present. This brief analysis of Luther's sermons suggests that the definition of Christ-centered

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soteriological legalism because "people who insist that you obey certain laws or moral rules in order to be saved . . . aren't legalists. They are lost!" Sam Storms, *Tough Topics*, 310. Since "legalism" is employed almost exclusively in a polemical sense (this is especially true when the term is used among RHP proponents), Storms' definition is preferable.

preaching has likely become too narrow. Evidence from other historical preachers, and more evidence from Luther's preaching, may further substantiate the need for a broader definition. Another area for further study is the development of a weighted definition of Christ-centered preaching to offer greater flexibility, as opposed to the current all-or-nothing approach.<sup>11</sup>

Second, further study of Luther's preaching could support the claim that he held a wide-angle view of pulpit ministry. Few evangelicals would deny the importance of the homiletical tools proposed by redemptive-historical advocates. At issue is not whether these are useful recommendations, but whether each of these elements is necessary in every sermon. Further study of Luther's preaching will likely reveal that he was content to build an overall foundation of law and gospel for his people. An isolated glance at individual sermons may paint Luther as sometimes antinomian and other times legalistic. Nevertheless, as Schuetze explains, "With all of his emphasis on grace, Luther did not have an antinomian bone in his body."<sup>12</sup> Luther's strategy was to ground his people firmly in the two languages of law and gospel—a foundation built slowly throughout his preaching ministry, not in a single sermon.

Third, further study of Luther's other writings could bolster the claims herein. For example, Luther's willingness to preach exemplaristically is evident here, and his reliance on exemplars was not an occasional mishap, but central to his homiletic. Indeed, Robert Kolb suggests that these exemplars represent a "foundation for Christian living."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Glenn LaRue has done much of the spadework in this regard in his helpful dissertation. Glenn Raymond LaRue, "Weighing Sermon Substance: Evaluating a Sermon's Degree of Expository Merit, Doctrinal Essence, and Christ-Centeredness" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011).

<sup>12</sup>Armin W. Schuetze, "On the Third Use of the Law, Luther's Position in the Antinomian Debate," in *No Other Gospel: Essays in Commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of the Formula of Concord*, ed. Arnold J. Koelpin (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1980), 225.

<sup>13</sup>Robert Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a*  
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He argues,

Luther presumed that the examples of the patriarchs, their families, and their contemporaries, as well as the New Testament contemporaries of Jesus and Paul, provided guidance for conducting daily life in the sixteenth century. . . . Even though Luther was convinced that many have only contempt for the common and ordinary details of family found in the stories of Abraham and Sarah, the Holy Spirit had intended to instruct all readers of Scripture in the proper way of conducting human life.<sup>14</sup>

Luther underpinned this exemplarism with a belief in the transformational nature of preaching and the Scripture itself. Kolb continues, quoting from Luther:

In his treatments of Genesis, Luther puts to use a host of examples that, rather than relating tales of extravagant religious performances, tell how "the fathers live in their households with their children, wives, domestics, and cattle. Here there is no outward show of religion, but there is only one coarse sack of household life."<sup>15</sup>

Additional studies of Luther's writings, especially his postils and lectures, could yield additional insight into the reformer's brand of Christ-centered preaching and teaching.

Fourth, further study of Luther's handling of law and gospel may provide the preacher with a more flexible and robust alternative to redemptive-historical preaching. One of the unintended consequences of redemptive-historical preaching is that requiring preachers to move rapidly from law to gospel in a single sermon may hamper the preacher's ability to preach both law and gospel effectively. When a gospel caveat immediately follows every use of the law, the law cannot sufficiently do its work. Conversely, the gospel is far less glorious when not understood against a backdrop of unfettered law. In its first and second uses, the law contrasts the gospel by revealing the depths of humanity's sin and the heights of Christ's sacrifice. In its third use, the law complements the gospel by revealing the transforming power of Christ to change those he saves. Further study of Luther's homiletic may allow the preacher to focus on law or

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*Foundation for Christian Living* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

<sup>14</sup>Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God*, 143.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

gospel, given the concerns of the text and the needs of the congregation.

Further study will undoubtedly help preachers and theologians who desire to present God's Word accurately, no matter the results. Perhaps faithful preachers throughout history will support many of the proposals suggested by advocates of redemptive-historical preaching. Perhaps a closer look at Martin Luther's preaching will reveal that his homiletics conform more closely to redemptive-historical preaching than this dissertation has determined. Regardless, further study on what it means to preach Christ faithfully will help the pulpit, not hinder it.

### **The Homiletical Legacy of Martin Luther**

Cornelis Trimp rightly surmises, "Our preaching today would be unimaginable apart from the work of Luther."<sup>16</sup> The reformer's law-gospel paradigm has been influencing Lutheran homiletics for nearly five hundred years, but its import among a broader swath of evangelicalism has largely been ignored. This study is not ultimately concerned with dismantling or discrediting redemptive-historical preaching, but with liberating men of God to preach the Word of God faithfully. On the contrary, many redemptive-historical proponents would find much common ground with Luther's homiletic. It is the more radical and exclusivistic expressions of RHP that this dissertation hopes to correct. The law-gospel paradigm in Luther's Christ-centered homiletic can function as a corrective to this exclusivism by vindicating preachers heretofore labeled as "sub-Christian."

Perhaps this deeper look at Luther's preaching may lead to rejoicing on both sides of this debate. May the preachers who faithfully strive to proclaim Christ receive liberation from the threat of the sub-Christian sermon, even if their methodology differs

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<sup>16</sup>Cornelis Trimp, *Preaching and the History of Salvation: Continuing an Unfinished Discussion*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Scarsdale, NY: Westminster Discount Book Service, 1996), 103.

from their redemptive-historical counterparts. May the preachers who remain thoroughly convinced of the RH homiletic make space for alternative approaches that preach Christ, albeit differently. As John Frame questions,

Why is it, I wonder, that in our circles whenever anybody gets an interesting idea, it produces a party that makes it a test of orthodoxy, leading to another party that opposes it, and then to battles between these parties in the churches? . . . They think that their view alone is orthodox, and that their opponents are dangerous heretics. Can't we just lighten up a bit? Can we never admit our fallibility? Is there not a place, on some issues, for teachability, even tolerance? Can't we ever agree to disagree in peace and love, working together on those matters where we agree?<sup>17</sup>

The Apostle Paul once remarked that whether men preached Christ out of rivalry or good will, he would rejoice in the proclamation of Jesus' name.<sup>18</sup> The reality is that both Luther's law-gospel paradigm and redemptive-historical preaching revel in the unashamed proclamation of Jesus Christ. Little else could be cause for greater rejoicing, regardless of the methodological differences that divide them. *Nihil nisi Christus praedicantur.*

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<sup>17</sup> John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 296.

<sup>18</sup>"Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice" (Phil 1:15-18).

APPENDIX 1  
DETAILED ANALYSIS OF *USUS LEGIS*

Below are the quotations from Luther's sermons that represent each instance of *Usus Legis* in his preaching. Since the purpose of the first use is to restrain sin, these threats of the law usually appear in a *conditional mood*. However, the first use can also appear in the indicative mood, evident by its purpose to warn the sinner. The ultimate purpose of the law in its second use is to drive the sinner to Christ. However, its penultimate purpose is to reveal the wickedness of the sinner. In this sense, the second use of the law appears primarily in an *indicative mood*, explicating the sinfulness of the sinner. In its third use, the law functions as a guide to redirect the hearer towards holiness. The law as guide usually appears in the *imperative mood*. Words like “must,” “should,” and “ought” will frequently appear alongside the third use.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the third use is not restricted to explicit imperatives. This use of the law can also appear in the indicative mood where the imperative is implied.<sup>2</sup>

Each usage of law is presented in reference to one of the twofold promises of the gospel. When the first use of the law threatens hell or damnation, it is in reference to the gospel promise of justification. When it threatens peace, security, comfort, or some

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<sup>1</sup>Imperatives in this appendix will be delineated with italics.

<sup>2</sup>Admittedly, there are some judgment calls being made in the categorizations below. Some of the uses of the law contain a greater degree of ambiguity, and the reader may register a difference of opinion on some of the placements. This is not a hard science, but requires some level of interpretation of the *intent* of Luther's statements throughout his preaching. Nonetheless, in my estimation the differences will be relatively few and will not render these findings invalid. Furthermore, the highest degree of certainty below involves the imperatival features of the third use, where Luther's greatest potential to remedy RHP imbalance lies.

other grace of God it appears in reference to the gospel promise of sanctification. When the second use accuses the hearer of unbelief, it is in reference to the gospel promise of justification. When it accuses the hearer of indwelling sin, it is in reference to the gospel promise of sanctification. When the third use commands the sinner to repent and believe, it appears in reference to the gospel promise of justification. When it commands the hearer to live in obedience, it appears in reference to the gospel promise of sanctification. However, it must be noted that the connection between the legal imperative and the gospel promise is not always explicit in Luther's preaching. The reformer frequently issued imperatives without drawing a direct connection between that imperative and the gospel. Apart from context, isolated imperatives cannot be properly positioned or understood.

### **Matthew 7:12**

Luther's sermon on Matthew 7:12 featured 5 instances of the first use, 9 of the second, and 18 of the third.<sup>3</sup>

#### **First Use**

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "And in all this we are required to do to our neighbor what we are able to do. If we do not do this, we hide the Lord's talent and are condemned along with that servant." (8)

"He who sees a naked man and does not clothe him, if he is able, will not be saved." (11)

"He who sees a thirsty or hungry man and does not feed him, if he is able, will be damned." (11)

"If he finds that this is so, he may hope that he will be saved. But if not, I beseech and admonish him to amend his ways that he may not perish." (12)

"If in our ill will we say: I will let him go, disengage myself from him, then I ask whether you also wish that God should say to you: I will let you go, I will disengage myself from you and neither give nor take anything from you? Who would wish that? But this is precisely what he will do to us, if this is what we do to our neighbor without sufficient

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<sup>3</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, *Sermons I*, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 5–13.

cause." (13)

## Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "Let each one enter into his own heart ... and if he sees that this is the case and still does not do likewise to the other person, he sins and will never merit eternal life, for he does not wish to do to the other person in his need what he himself would wish for himself in his need." (7-8)

"He too was not damned because he took something away from others, but because he did not give to others. So it will be with us." (8)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Man kills, robs, wounds, defames, burns, seduces, and makes sad. Beyond this, he is also capable of cherishing hatred and jealousy." (11)

"He who hears one person slander another and remains silent and does not apologize for him, that person sins." (11)

"If one does not resist the slander, this is to commit an 'alien sin.'" (11)

"He who sees another person sinning or erring, morally especially, and does not instruct and rebuke and admonish him, but rather laughs and applauds, that person sins the same sin." (11)

"From these our morals, one observes that nobody cares about the law and the prophets and there is almost no Christian life among us." (12)

"Behold, we not only do not "do good," we have not yet "departed from evil," and thus keep neither of the two rules, but do everything that is contrary to them." (12)

"Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.' . . . This saying should be a mirror for every man and in it he should view all his works." (12)

## Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "It is not sufficient for salvation that a man merely refrain from doing harm and evil to his neighbor with these three good. It is required rather that he be useful to him and benefit him with these three goods." (7, implied imperative)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Each person can conduct himself toward his neighbor in two ways. First, with these goods he can do harm and evil to him, or, second, he can advance and benefit him." (6, implied imperative)

"We have in the Scriptures two rules to guide us . . . Psalm 33 '*depart from evil*,' . . . and '*do good*.'" (7)

"We must also *do good* to the other person." (7)

"This parable adequately teaches us that it is not sufficient merely not to do evil and not to do harm, but rather that one must be helpful and *do good*. It is not enough to 'depart from evil;' one must also '*do good*.'" (8)

"Let each one *be helpful* to the other as God has given to him." (8)

"It is necessary to do good and not only refrain from doing evil." (9, implied imperative)

"It is not enough merely to refrain from this, as has been said." (9, implied imperative)

"We are bound to excuse, defend, console, and teach our neighbor." (9, implied imperative)

"We must also *do good* as far as we are able." (9)

"We are held under God's command to *do this* as far as we are able to others also when they are in need." (9-10)

"You shall *love* your neighbor as yourself." (10)

"Whatsoever you wish that men would do to you, *do so* to them, etc." (10)

"We must *bring forth fruit* by doing good to others." (10)

"The Lord did not say: Whatever you wish that men would do to you, grant it to them in your heart; but rather '*do so* to them.'" (13)

"*Look* into the mirror of this saying, namely, whether you wish that this be done to you." (13)

"*Hold up* the mirror of these words to your conscience and see whether any such motive would prompt you not to wish any good to be done to you by others if they cherished any such motive toward you." (13)

"All the goods we have are from God and they are not given to us to retain and abuse, but rather to *dispense*." (13)

### **Psalm 19:1**

Luther's sermon on Psalm 19:1 featured 12 instances of the second use and 2 of the third.<sup>4</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 7 times, 5 times in relation to the promise of justification, and twice in relation to sanctification.

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<sup>4</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 17–23.

## Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "The works of men, which they glory in . . . are nothing, or better, actually sins." (18)

"Proud man can bear neither of these indignities; for here his works . . . are shown to be polluted, even shameful." (18)

"They who deem themselves just and wise and think they are somebody are most violently hostile to this alien work, which is the cross of Christ and our Adam. For they do not want what is theirs to be despised and regarded as foolish and evil, that is, they do not want their Adam to be killed. So they do not come to God's proper work, which is justification or the resurrection of Christ." (19)

"All men are sinners and devoid of the grace by God." (20)

"The proud, who are righteous with the righteousness of works, and have not done these works, already live in security, as though they had fulfilled the law, nor are they conscious of any sin in themselves, but of much righteousness." (20)

"By this preaching [John the Baptist] claims unceasingly that all men are sinful." (21)

"Such are, now and always, all who put their trust in their own righteousness, who are bent solely on hearing—from themselves, not from Christ—the gospel, that is, the good news that they are just and that they are doing what is right." (21-22)

"They believe that the gospel is false, that it is a lie. That is why they are the most irritated of all men, prompt to defend themselves and to be vindictive against others, to justify themselves and judge and condemn others, complaining and charging that they are being done an injustice when they are actually doing what is right." (22)

"They do not fulfil the law in spirit, that at all events they sin and have evil desires in their hearts. And even though they do not kill anybody, they are nevertheless angry. They may not steal, but they are avaricious. They may not commit adultery, but they have evil desires." (22)

"All sin and have sinned." (22)

"No one understands the law unless it be explained to him." (22)

"[The sinner] wants to keep the commandments and yet is not able to keep them at all." (23)

## Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (21)

"Sins are remitted only to those who are dissatisfied with themselves, and this is what it means to repent." (22, implied imperative)

## Gospel

**Promise for justifying grace.** "The gospel is nothing else but the proclamation of the works of God, for it preaches what God does." (18)

"The gospel . . . reveals human shame, and, since it manifests the works of God, discloses the idleness and sin of men." (18)

"The acts of God are therefore the righteous and the Christians; they are his new creation." (19)

"The office of the gospel is twofold. The proper office of the gospel is to proclaim the work of God, i.e. grace, through which the Father of mercies freely gives to all men peace, righteousness and truth, mitigating all his wrath. Therefore it is called a good, delightful, sweet, friendly gospel, and he who hears it finds it impossible not to rejoice." (20)

"No one understands the law unless it be explained to him. This, however, the gospel does." (22)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "The work of God . . . is nothing else but to create righteousness, peace, mercy, truth, patience, kindness, joy, and health, inasmuch as the righteous, truthful, peaceful, kind, joyful, healthy, patient, merciful cannot do otherwise than act according to His nature. Therefore, God creates righteous, peaceful, patient, merciful, truthful, kind, joyful, wise, healthy men. These are his handiwork or his creations." (18)

"Therefore, Christ, the kingdom of heaven, he who comes to save sinners, comes into them." (21)

### Matthew 11:25-30 (1517)

Luther's 1517 sermon on Matthew 11:25-30 featured 1 instance of the first use, 11 of the second, and 9 of the third.<sup>5</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 8 times, 7 times in relation to the promise of justification, and once in relation to sanctification.

#### First Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "If they would give up themselves and hate their sins, they would have no punishment and would not need to fear it; for when the sin is taken away the punishment ceases of itself." (30)

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<sup>5</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 26–31.

## Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "All others . . . are wise only because they are not fools, not empty, not hungry for wisdom, and not babes [before God]." (27)

"The knowledge of God and Christ . . . is that which is hidden, against which the wise and holy make their assaults." (28)

"They think they are offering service to God by being wise and understanding, not babes. . . . [they] know neither the Father nor the Son." (28)

"This is so hidden from the wise that, immediately they hear it, they begin to babble: "We shall not do good. 'Why not do evil that good may come?' If we are justified through a righteousness outside of us and solely through God's mercy, then let us take our ease, since our work is all in vain and our wisdom is nothing." (29)

"These others drudge and sweat in their own wisdom and righteousness and burden themselves in vain with tremendous misery. For they want to attain peace of conscience through their own counsels and accomplishments and their own self-chosen ways . . . which is impossible and is only to build on sand." (29)

"No matter how much they work, labor, and speculate, they accomplish nothing else except to increase the restlessness of their souls, which is just what they are seeking to escape through all their efforts." (29)

"The labor too is the burden, that is, we labor to find rest and this very labor only burdens us more, since the sin is only increased through our righteousness and works." (30)

"All these desire to escape, not their sins, but the punishment of their sins—for they are slaves, they hate, not the sin, but the penalty of sin—therefore they seek to extinguish the fire of hell and escape the judgment by all kinds of sanctification. . . . they are looking after their own interests." (30)

"They do not want to give up themselves and are afraid of Christ's easy yoke." (30)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Through [indulgences] nothing is accomplished except that the people learn to fear and flee and dread the penalty of sins, but not the sins themselves. . . . Therefore . . . we do see a great sense of self-security and licentious sinning." (31)

"Oh, you snoring priests! Oh, darkness deeper than Egyptian! How secure we are in the midst of the worst of all our evils!" (31)

## Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "He who acknowledges himself to be a fool in the sight of God to him this humility will be accounted as the highest wisdom." (27, implied imperative)

"If only they would first become babes, in order to be able to accept the Father and the Son, who reveals himself, they would easily solve the question as to why it is not the do-nothings to whom wisdom, that is Christ, is revealed." (29, implied imperative)

"To these Christ now says, "*Come to me all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest;*" for you cannot refresh yourselves, you cannot give yourselves rest, but I can. What is there left in you? *Get out of yourselves and come to me. Despair of yourselves and hope in me.*" (29)

"We must *go out of ourselves, for we labor and are heavy-laden.*" (30)

"*Come to me, all who are fatigued and heavy-laden.*" (30)

"He does not say: Do this or that; but rather, *come to me, get away from yourselves, and carry your cross after me.*" (30)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "He who no longer lives to himself but Christ in him need not fear that Christ is doing nothing." (29, implied imperative)

"Not through indulgences, but through gentleness and lowliness . . . is rest for your souls found." (31, implied imperative)

"The people ought rather to be exhorted to love the punishment and embrace the cross." (31)

## Gospel

**Promise for justifying grace.** "Where then, is wisdom? Where is righteousness? Where is virtue? Not in us, but in Christ. It is outside of us, in God." (28)

"[Knowledge] is therefore neither of us nor in us, but is to be sought in God." (28)

"[Concerning justification] He leaves nothing to us. Really nothing!" (28)

"Therefore, know that Christ himself was made our righteousness, virtue, and wisdom by God." (28)

"The Father in his mercy reckons to us his Son's righteousness, which is his own righteousness; for the righteousness of the Father and the Son are one; it is one life and one virtue which is given to us. This is what it means to know the Father of Christ." (29)

"One cannot escape [judgment] except through knowing the Father and the Son, that is, through knowing the grace and mercy of God which is freely given to us in Christ and the merits of Christ which are imputed to us." (29)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "He who no longer lives to himself but Christ in him need not fear that Christ is doing nothing. No, on the contrary, he is supremely active and present with all sweetness and ease." (29)

## Exodus 25:9-27:18

Luther's sermon on Exodus 25:9-27:18 featured 13 instances of the second use and 6 of the third.<sup>6</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 6 times, half in relation to the promise of justification, and the other half in relation to sanctification.

### Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "As a result of [courtyard righteousness] people become hardened and blind, and in this state you can tell them nothing. Let us give a few examples. Priests, monks, nuns, bishops, and all the clergy wear clothes different from the general run of people. They also do other kinds of jobs, wear sacred vestments in church, pray, sing, and so on. These are all outward works linked to dress and occasion. Now he who does these things holds that such teaching has been established by law and that they are called to good works, the good life, the spiritual office. When he has done them he believes that he has most certainly earned a good conscience" (for what it is worth) and that he has done the right thing. The opposite is true, too—if he overlooks one of them or neglects to do it . . . he gets a bad conscience, like a man who has not kept the commandments." (236)

"We act the same way when we observe or break the prescribed commandments, fasts, and feasts, until, through the neglect of the clergy, who are asleep on the job, we reach the point where we make it a more serious matter of conscience for someone to eat a morsel of bread on the eve of a fast than to soak himself in drink, or curse and swear, lie, deceive, or commit adultery or some other serious sin, so inseparably does this kind of teaching bind life and conscience to food and external things." (236)

"What laymen or man in the street does not endure worse pangs of conscience if he eats eggs or butter or meat on the eve of a saint's day or other fast day than if he had killed or been unchaste by word or deed?" (236-237)

"Such a view of conscience and such error arise from the fact that people have got everything confused and do not differentiate one thing from another in the right way." (237)

"Is it not true that everybody, spiritual and secular estate alike, is unfaithful, prideful, avaricious, hateful, unchaste, and commits all the sins there are, and that nobody takes the slightest notice of them?" (237)

"The laity think the same, that all they have to do is to keep their fasts and feasts. As if our God were bothered in the slightest whether you drink beer or water, whether you eat fish or meat, whether you keep the feasts or fasts!" (237)

"He makes things which matter little if at all into strict matters of conscience. . . . This [external] holiness shines brighter in the eyes of the world than does real holiness." (238)

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<sup>6</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, *The Christian in Society I*, ed. James Atkinson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 235–42.

"Anybody can see for himself that such a "churchedish" external system betters nobody, and that all the performances bound up with food and clothes, occasion and place, make nobody righteous." (238)

"Nobody is more deeply involved in those sins than those very people who have equated righteousness with matters of food, clothing, and observances of time and place." (238)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Some do [good] works in a living and selfless way. Others, however, set about them in the wrong way. . . . God does not just want such works by themselves. He wants them to be performed gladly and willingly. And when there is no joy in doing them and the right will and motive are absent, then they are dead in God's eyes. Such work is riddled with errors; it is service under compulsion, necessity, and duress and is not pleasing to God." (240)

"Such gladness, love, joy, and willingness are not found in the heart of any man on earth. As far as our nature goes, we are all sinners. We do not really want to be righteous; we only pretend because we are afraid of being punished or disgraced." (241)

"He does not allow himself to be content with righteousness, as he ought to do, but is determined by means of it either to earn something or escape something." (241)

"Tragically has it come to pass that there has never been a people on the face of the earth that has had a bigger atrium, more holy foods, more holy garments, more holy days, more holy places than Christians now have!" (242)

### Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "We ought to *be wise* enough to despise the transgressions of their external pomposities in which we see so much that is corrupt. We must *get into the habit* of looking in the right direction." (239)

"We *ought to make* it a matter of conscience if anybody blasphemes, swears, or speaks uncleanly, or if anybody hears, sees does, or thinks anything improper." (239)

"A man must *fight* against pride, avarice, immodesty, anger, hatred, and the like. Here must we keep ourselves fully occupied as long as we live." (240)

"He who seeks nothing other than holiness is the one who seeks God himself, and he will find him." (241, implied imperative)

"For these reasons a man has to *go down on his knees* for grace and *deny* himself." (241)

"Good works without faith cannot happen, and . . . faith without works cannot endure." (242, implied imperative)

### Gospel

**Promise for justifying grace.** "Here he has set Christ before us and promised

that he who believes in him and calls on his name shall at once receive the Holy Spirit." (241)

"A man who denies himself and calls upon Christ in genuine trust is certain to receive the Holy Spirit." (241)

"Christ referred to this when he said in Mark 16:16, "He that believes shall be saved." Faith alone saves. Why? Faith brings with it the Spirit, and he performs every good work with joy and love." (242)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "He who seeks nothing other than holiness is the one who seeks God himself, and he will find him." (241)

"When the Spirit comes, however, look, he makes a pure, free, cheerful, glad, and loving heart, a heart which is simply gratuitously righteous, seeking no reward, fearing no punishment. Such a heart is holy for the sake of holiness and righteousness alone and does everything with joy." (241-242)

"May God redeem us from [religious works] and protect us with his grace." (242)

### **Invocavit Sermons**

Luther's Invocavit Sermons featured 9 instances of the first use, 25 of the second, and 61 of the third.<sup>7</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 9 times, thrice in relation to the promise of justification, and the 6 times in relation to sanctification.

#### **First Use**

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Let us beware lest Wittenberg become Capernaum." (71)

"The devil . . . will succeed, if we are not on our guard." (73)

"If we do not earnestly pray to God and act rightly in this matter, it looks to me as if all the misery which we have begun to heap upon the papists will fall upon us." (74-75)

"But if all are not heart and soul for [the private mass'] abolishment—leave it in God's hands, I beseech you, otherwise the result will not be good." (76)

"Out of the making of one law grew a thousand laws, until they have completely buried us under laws. And this is what will happen here, too; one law will soon make two, two will increase to three, and so forth." (78)

"Let us beware lest we lead astray those of weak conscience." (78)

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<sup>7</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 69–100.

"If you cannot [rest upon Scripture], you will never withstand—the devil will pluck you like a parched leaf." (80)

"It is a wonder you were not struck to the ground by thunder and lightning." (89)

"And if you will not love one another, God will send a great plague upon you; let this be a warning to you, for God will not have his Word revealed and preached in vain." (96)

"Yea, the devil would have slain me long ago, if the confession had not sustained me." (98)

## Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "In the first place, we must know that we are the children of wrath, and all our works, intentions, and thoughts are nothing at all." (70)

"We are all the children of wrath." (70)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "And here, dear friends, have you not grievously failed? I see no signs of love among you, and I observe very well that you have not been grateful to God for his rich gifts and treasures." (71)

"The cause is good, but there has been too much haste. For there are still brothers and sisters on the other side who belong to us and must still be won." (72)

"For [the abolishment of the mass] was done in wantonness, with no regard for proper order and with offense to your neighbor. If, beforehand, you had called upon God in earnest prayer, and had obtained the aid of the authorities, one could be certain that it had come from God." (73)

"Here one can see that you do not have the Spirit, even though you do have a deep knowledge of the Scriptures." (74)

"Love . . . never uses force or undue constraint." (75)

"If [matters of conscience] are forbidden, the forbidding is wrong, since it is contrary to God's ordinance." (79)

"Paul . . . preached against their idols, but he overthrew none by force. And you rush, create an uproar, break down altars, and overthrow images! Do you really believe you can abolish the altars in this way? No, you will only set them up more firmly." (83)

"For whoever places an image in a church imagines he has performed a service to God and done a good work, which is downright idolatry." (84)

"But now you go ahead and become as foolish as the pope, in that you think that a person must touch the sacrament with his hands." (89)

"All other things God might have suffered, but this he cannot allow, because you have made a compulsion of it." (89)

"Although I must acknowledge that you committed no sin when you touched the sacrament with your hands . . . it was not a good work, because it caused offense everywhere." (90)

"Why will you not in this respect also serve those who are weak in faith and abstain from your liberty particularly since it does not help you to do it, nor harm you if you do not do it." (90)

"You should have allowed it to remain thus and not forced it into a law. But now you go at it pell mell, and headlong force every one to it. Dear friends, you will not succeed in that way." (91)

"If you desire to be regarded as better Christians than others just because you take the sacrament into your hands and also receive it in both kinds, you are bad Christians as far as I am concerned. In this way even a sow could be a Christian, for she has a big enough snout to receive the sacrament outwardly." (91)

"Bodily and outward reception [of the sacrament] is that in which a man receives with his mouth the body of Christ and his blood, and doubtless any man can receive the sacrament in this way, without faith and love. But this does not make a man a Christian, for if it did, even a mouse would be a Christian, for it, too, can eat the bread and perchance even drink out of the cup. It is such a simple thing to do." (92)

"And if robbery, usury, unchastity, and all sins were cast upon one big heap, this sin [of forcing everyone to take the sacrament] would overtop all others, at the very time when they [who come to the sacrament] want to be most holy." (93)

"He who has such faith has his rightful place here and receives the sacrament as an assurance, or seal, or sign to assure him of God's promise and grace. But, of course, we do not all have such faith; would God one-tenth of the Christians had it!" (93)

"Love, I say, is a fruit of this sacrament. But this I do not yet perceive among you here in Wittenberg, even though you have had much preaching and, after all, you ought to have carried this out in practice." (96)

"It is true, you have the true gospel and the pure Word of God, but no one as yet has given his goods to the poor, no one has yet been burned, and even these things would be nothing without love." (96)

"You are willing to take all of God's goods in the sacrament, but you are not willing to pour them out again in love. Nobody extends a helping hand to another, nobody seriously considers the other person, but everyone looks out for himself and his own gain, insists on his own way, and lets everything else go hang. If anybody is helped, well and good; but nobody looks after the poor to see how you might be able to help them. This is a pity. You have heard many sermons about it and all my books are full of it and have this one purpose, to urge you to faith and love." (96)

"You are not heeding it at all and you are playing around with all kinds of tomfoolery which does not amount to anything." (96)

"We no longer have any trace of [ecclesial] confession any more; at this point the gospel is in abeyance." (97)

"We need many absolutions and assurances, because we must fight against the devil, death, hell, and sin." (99-100)

### Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "God has sent us his only-begotten Son that we may *believe* in him and that whoever *trusts* in him shall be free from sin and a child of God." (71)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Every one must *fight* his own battle with death by himself, alone." (70)

"Every one must himself *know* and *be armed* with the chief things which concern a Christian." (70)

"Here we should all *be very well versed* in the Bible and *ready to confront* the devil with many passages." (71)

"We must also have love and through love we must do to one another as God has done to us through faith." (71)

"Dear friends, the kingdom of God,—and we are that kingdom—does not consist in talk or words, but in activity, in deeds, in works and exercises. God does not want hearers and repeaters of words, but followers and doers, and this occurs in faith through love." (71, implied imperative)

"We also need patience." (71, implied imperative)

"And here, dear friends, one must *not insist* upon his rights, but must *see* what may be useful and helpful to his brother." (72)

"Therefore, dear brethren, *follow me*; I have never been a destroyer." (72)

"Let us, therefore, let us *act* with fear and humility, *cast ourselves* at one another's feet, *join hands* with each other, and *help* one another." (73)

"Let us *show love* to our neighbors; if we do not do this, our work will not endure. *We must have patience* with them for a time, and *not cast out him* who is weak in faith; and do and omit to do many other things, so long as love requires it and it does no harm to our faith." (74)

"Love must deal with our neighbor in the same manner as God has dealt with us; it must walk the straight road, straying neither to the left nor to the right." (75)

"[The private mass] *must* be abolished." (75)

"Yet Christian love should *not employ harshness* here *nor force* the matter. However, it *should be preached* and *taught* with tongue and pen that to hold mass in such a manner is sinful, and yet *no one should be dragged away* from it by the hair; for it *should be left to God*, and his Word *should be allowed to work alone*, without our work or interference."

(76)

"We should *give free course* to the Word and *not add our works* to it. We have the *jus verbi* [right to speak] but not the *executio* [power to accomplish]. *We should preach* the Word, but the results must be left solely to God's good pleasure." (76)

"We must first *win the hearts* of the people. But that is done when I *teach only the Word of God, preach* the gospel, and *say*: Dear lords or pastors, abandon the mass, it is not right, you are sinning when you do it; I cannot refrain from telling you this. But I would not make it an ordinance for them, nor urge a general law." (76)

"If the hearts and minds of all are agreed and united, *abolish it*." (76)

"This is the principle by which you *must be governed*." (77)

"Love, therefore, *demands that you have compassion* on the weak, as all the apostles had." (77)

"The private masses *must be abolished*." (79)

"Nevertheless, *no one should be dragged* to them or away from them by the hair." (79)

"These things are matters of choice and *must not be forbidden* by any one." (79)

"If you can keep to it without burdensomeness, then *keep it*; but it *must not* be made a general law." (79)

"Every one *must stand* on his own feet and be prepared to give battle to the devil. You *must rest* upon a strong and clear text of Scripture if you would stand the test." (80)

"Therefore any monk or nun who finds that he is too weak to maintain chastity should conscientiously *examine* himself; if his heart and conscience are thus strengthened, let him *take a wife and be a husband*." (80)

"If anybody forbids [leaving the cloister], as the pope, the Antichrist, has done, *you should not obey*." (80)

"Thus, dear friends, I have said it clearly enough, and I believe you ought to *understand it* and *not make liberty* a law." (81)

"Here we *must admit* that we may have images and make images, but we *must not worship* them, and if they are worshipped, they *should be put away and destroyed*, just as King Hezekiah broke in pieces the bronze serpent erected by Moses." (82)

"This is what we *must preach and teach*, and let the Word alone do the work, as I said before." (83)

"On the subject of images, in particular, we saw that they *ought to be abolished* when they are worshipped." (84)

"Nevertheless, we cannot and ought not to condemn a thing which may be any way useful to a person. You *should rather have taught* that images are nothing, that God cares nothing for them, and that he is not served nor pleased when we make an image for him,

but that we would do better to give a poor man a goldpiece than God a golden image; for God has forbidden the latter, but not the former." (85)

"We *must*, therefore, *be on guard*, for the devil, through his apostles, is after us with all his craft and cunning." (85)

"Nevertheless we *must not* on that account *reject* [images], *nor condemn* anything because it is abused." (85)

"First, if you cannot abstain from meat without harm to yourself, or if you are sick, you may *eat* whatever you like, and if anyone takes offense, let him be offended." (86)

"Secondly, if you should be pressed to eat fish instead of meat on Friday . . . you *must* in no wise allow yourself to be drawn away from the liberty in which God has placed you, but *do just the contrary* to spite [the pope]." (87)

"Toward such well-meaning people [who are weak in faith] we *must assume* an entirely different attitude from that which we assume toward the stubborn. We *must bear patiently* with these people and not use our liberty; since it brings no peril or harm to body or soul; in fact, it is rather salutary, and we are doing our brothers and sisters a great service besides." (87)

"Thus we, too, *should order our lives* and *use our liberty* at the proper time, so that Christian liberty may suffer no injury, and no offense be given to our weak brothers and sisters who are still without the knowledge of this liberty." (88)

"We *must let* the Word of God alone do the work." (88)

"You should *give thanks* to God." (89)

"Therefore, dear friends, we *must be on firm ground*, if we are to withstand the devil's attack." (90)

"No new practices *should be introduced*, unless the gospel has first been thoroughly preached and understood, as it has been among you." (90)

"Therefore, I beseech you, *give up* this practice." (90)

"[The sacrament] must not be made compulsory nor a general law. We must rather promote and practice and preach the Word, and then afterwards leave the result and execution of it entirely to the Word, giving everyone his freedom in this matter." (90)

"You should have *allowed* it to remain thus and *not forced* it into a law." (91)

"We must *deal soberly* with such high things. Dear friends, this dare be no mockery, and if you are going to follow me, stop it." (91)

"There *must be faith* to make the reception worthy and acceptable before God." (92)

"But faith (which we all *must have*, if we wish to go to the sacrament worthily) is a firm trust that Christ, the Son of God, stands in our place and has taken all our sins upon his shoulders and that he is the eternal satisfaction for our sin and reconciles us with God the Father." (92)

"Therefore, this sacrament *must not be made* a law, as the most holy father, the pope, has done with his fool's commandment." (93)

"He who is not thus prepared *should abstain* for a while from this sacrament, for this food will not enter a sated and full heart, and if it comes to such a heart, it is harmful." (94)

"We shall *come* [to the sacrament] with all humbleness and reverence and not run to it brashly and hastily, without all fear and humility." (94)

"This is the true use and practice of this sacrament, and whoever does not find himself in this state, let him *refrain* from coming until God also takes hold of him and draws him through his Word." (95)

"[Love] is the chief thing, which is the only business of a Christian man." (96, implied imperative)

"If you do not want to show yourselves Christian by your love, then *leave* the other things undone, too." (96)

"This confession is commanded by God in Matt. 18." (97, implied imperative)

"Here is where you *should have exerted* yourselves and re-established this kind of confession, and let the other things go." (97)

"It *should be done* this way: when you see a usurer, adulterer, thief, or drunkard, you *should go to him* in secret, and *admonish* him to give up his sin. If he will not listen, you *should take* two others with you and *admonish* him once more, in a brotherly way, to give up his sin. But if he scorns that, you *should tell* the pastor before the whole congregation, have your witnesses with you, and *accuse* him before the pastor in the presence of the people . . . Then, if he will not give up and willingly acknowledge his guilt, the pastor *should exclude* him and put him under the ban before the whole assembly, for the sake of the congregation, until he comes to himself and is received back again." (97-98)

"[Personal] confession is also commanded." (98, implied imperative)

"There are many doubtful matters which a man cannot resolve or find the answer to by himself, and so he takes his brother aside and tells him his trouble." (98, implied imperative)

"Moreover, we *must have* many absolutions, so that we may *strengthen* our timid consciences and despairing hearts against the devil and against God. Therefore, *no man shall forbid* the confession *nor keep or draw* any one away from it. And if any one is wrestling with his sins and wants to be rid of them and desires a sure word on the matter, let him *go* and *confess* to another in secret, and *accept* what he says to him as if God himself had spoken it through the mouth of this person. However, one who has a strong, firm faith that his sins are forgiven may *let this confession go* and *confess* to God alone." (99)

"I will not let this private confession be taken from me. But I will not have anybody forced to it, but left to each one's free will." (99, implied imperative)

"We must not allow any of our weapons to be taken away, but *keep intact* the whole

armor and equipment which God has given us to use against our enemies." (100)

## **Gospel**

**Promise for justifying grace.** "God has sent us his only-begotten Son that we may believe in him and that whoever trusts in him shall be free from sin and a child of God." (71)

"That is God's work alone, who causes faith to live in the heart." (76)

"Now we have received from God nothing but love and favor, for Christ has pledged and given us his righteousness and everything he has; he has poured out upon us all his treasures, which no man can measure and no angel can understand or fathom, for God is a glowing furnace of love, reaching even from the earth to the heavens." (95)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "God would accomplish more with his Word than if you and I were to merge all our power into one heap." (76)

"When the Word is given free course and is not bound to any external observance, it takes hold of one today and sinks into his heart, tomorrow it touches another, and so on." (90)

"But if you believe that God steps in for you and stakes all he has and his blood for you, as if he were saying: Fall in behind me without fear or delay, and then let us see what can harm you; come devil, death, sin, and hell, and all creation, I shall go before you, for I will be your rear guard and your vanguard; trust me and boldly rely upon me. He who believes that can not be harmed by devil, hell, sin, or death; if God fights for him, what can you do to him?" (93)

"This food demands a hungering and longing man, for it delights to enter a hungry soul, which is constantly battling with its sins and eager to be rid of them." (94)

"This bread is comfort for the sorrowing, a healing for the sick, a life for the dying, a food for all the hungry, and a rich treasure for all the poor and needy." (95)

"For our God, the God we have, is not so niggardly that he has left us with only one comfort or strengthening for our conscience, or only one absolution, but we have many absolutions in the gospel and we are richly showered with many absolutions." (99)

## **Jude**

Luther's sermon on Jude featured 3 instances of the first use, 27 of the second, and 10 of the third.<sup>8</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 5 times, thrice in relation to the promise of justification, and the twice in relation to sanctification.

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<sup>8</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 30, *The Catholic Epistles*, ed. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 203–15.

## First Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "Jude now mentions these examples as a terrifying warning. It is as if he were now saying: May those who are called Christians and under this name "pervert the grace of God into licentiousness" beware, lest they share the fate of those people! Indeed, since the rise of the papacy and the suppression of the Gospel in the whole world God has punished the unbelievers and hurled them into the jaws of the devil with one plague after the other." (205)

"When the Lord comes, He will destroy the pope along with his rule." (211)

"The Lord will punish these ungodly sinners because of their impudent and stubborn preaching." (211).

## Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "To be sure, [ungodly persons] call themselves Christians and put the Gospel on display; but at the same time they live in an estate in which they are completely wanton in eating, drinking, and rascally living. Boastfully they say: "We are not in a worldly estate; we are in an estate that is spiritual." Under this name and semblance they have grabbed all property, honor, and sensual pleasure." (204)

"They deny the Lord Christ with deeds and with works. They regard themselves, not Him, as their Lord. When they proclaim that fasting, pilgrimages, founding churches, chastity, obedience, poverty, etc. are the way to salvation, they direct people to their works and keep silence about Christ." (205)

"Thus when they say that their tonsures and cowls, their obedience, poverty, and chastity please God, they look at this; but before God this is nothing but a mere dream." (206)

"The particular vice with which the apostles charge the spiritual estate is this, that they lead an unchaste life. . . . They cannot be chaste." (206)

"The third characteristic is their refusal to be obedient to secular authority. . . . Consequently, the pope's decree with regard to the liberties of the church is nothing but the law of the devil." (206)

"Although Michael was an archangel, says Jude, he was not so bold as to curse the devil himself. These blasphemers trample underfoot the authority ordained by God and curse it into the seventh, eighth, and ninth generation, even though they are men, and even though this archangel did not venture to curse the exceedingly wicked devil, who is already condemned, but only said: 'May the Lord restrain and punish you.'" (207)

"These people are such blasphemers that they can do nothing else than excommunicate, curse, and consign to the devil not only kings and majesties but also God and the saints, as is to be seen in the bull *In Coena Domini*. They do not know that our salvation rests on faith and love. They cannot bear our rejection and condemnation of their works. Nor can they bear our proclamation that Christ alone must help us with His works. Therefore they ban and revile all Christian doctrine, which they do not know." (207)

"To walk in the way of Cain means to depend on one's own works and to revile true works, to kill and murder those who walk in the right way, as these people do." (207-208)

"They . . . allow themselves to be diverted in all directions by many kinds of external works only for the sake of money, in order that they, like the prophet Balaam, may fill their bellies, as we have heard in Peter's epistle (2 Peter 2:15)." (208)

"Jude now applies this example to these revilers who accuse us of stirring up rebellion when we preach against them, even though they themselves are really responsible for all the misery." (208)

"All the world has brought up its children to become clerics and to have good days, not to have to support themselves with the labors of their hands or to preach but to live without a care in revelry and to have good cheer from the property which poor people acquire with their sweat." (209)

"One thinks [clerics] should be the best part and treasure in Christendom, yet they are nothing but blemishes and abominations." (209)

"They live without care and fear. They think that the devil cannot overthrow them. They do not feed the sheep, but they themselves are wolves who devour the sheep." (209)

"They are the clouds that soar high in the air. They sit in high places in the church as those who should preach. Yet they do not preach. No, they let themselves be driven hither and thither by the devil." (209)

"They are "fruitless tress in late autumn," he says. They have neither fruit nor leaves. They just stand there like other trees and let themselves be regarded as Christian bishops. Neither a word nor works are there; but everything together with the root is dead." (209)

"They are like "wild waves of the sea"; that is, just as the wind raises and drives the waves and billows on the water, so they go as the devil leads them. They cast up "the foam of their own shame" like a boiling pot. They are so full of villainy that they overflow and cannot retain anything. Everything has to come out." (209)

"They are "wandering stars," as one calls the planets that recede and do not follow a fixed and straight course. Thus they do not have a true course either. Their life and teaching are nothing but error, with which they deceive themselves and all who follow them." (209-210)

"Here Jude hits both their life and their preaching. This is what he wants to say: They speak harshly and sharply against the Lord who will come. They are insolent and arrogant; and, as St. Peter has said, they mock and revile Him. He is not speaking about their sinful and shameful life; he is speaking about their godless nature." (211)

"He who lives without faith is godless, even though he may lead an outwardly honorable life." (211)

"They are people who cannot be restrained, for they pretend to have jurisdiction over body and soul. They have usurped both the secular and the spiritual sword." (212)

"They have exempted themselves from all taxes, tribute, and revenue. One dare not touch their property. Furthermore, no one dare preach a word without first getting their

permission. And even if one attacks them with Scripture, they say that they alone must be permitted to interpret Scripture." (212)

"We have submitted ourselves both to the Gospel and to the secular sword. But they want to be free from and unrestrained by both. Over and above this, their entire law and standard of justice is nothing but an abundance of high-sounding, arrogant, and inflated words without any meaning." (212)

"They have reduced everything to externals. This is the kind of child's play and tomfoolery they have practiced. And they have regarded any violation of these regulations as a grave sin. Therefore Jude says very pertinently that they concentrate all their attention on masks." (212)

"We have mentioned above who the scoffers are, likewise those who follow their own passions, not only their carnal passions but also those of their ungodly life. We have said that they do everything as they please, that they respect neither the secular power nor the Word of God, that they are neither in the external nor in the internal rule, neither in the divine nor in the human rule; they hover in the air between heaven and earth as the devil leads them." (213)

"They bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). For they are the ones who have set themselves apart and destroy unity in faith. They are not satisfied with the common Christian estate, in which one serves the other; but they set up other estates and pretend to serve God by doing so. Moreover, they are sensual or beastly people with no more spirit and understanding than a horse or an ass has. They go along in their naturel understanding and carnal mind. They have no Word of God by which they can be guided or live." (213)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "The common man lets himself be tricked and fooled by this and devotes all his goods to it, as though it were the true service of God; that is, they are governed by appearances for the sake of gain." (212-213)

"As long as we live here, that old sack, our flesh and blood, still clings to us; it does not cease from its wantonness." (215)

### Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "[Jude says,] I also find it necessary to write to you in order to remind and exhort you to *persevere* and *forge ahead* in the faith once preached to you. It is as though he were saying: It is necessary for me to admonish you to be careful to *remain* on the right course." (203)

"Then, when faith is present, all the works man does *should redound* to the welfare of his neighbor; and one *should beware* of all works that are not done with the service of one's neighbor in mind, as is the case nowadays among priests and monks." (204)

"We have taught that as long as we sojourn on the earth, we must *be subject and obedient* to the government; for the Christian faith does not do away with the secular rule. Therefore no one can withdraw from it." (206)

"Here he summarizes in a few words what a completely Christian way of life is. Faith is the foundation on which one *should build*." (214)

"To build up means to *increase* from day to day in the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ." (214)

"Now when we are built up in this way, we should not do a single work in order to merit anything or to be saved; but everything must be done for the benefit of our neighbor." (214)

"Here we must be concerned to *remain* in love and not to fall from it like the fools who set up special works and a special way of life and thus divert people from love." (214)

"Our life *should be arranged* in such a way that it is nothing else than a constant longing and waiting for the future life." (214)

"Jude wants to say: *Have compassion* on some; *save* some; that is, *devote your life* to showing mercy to those who are wretched, blind, and hardened. *Do not* take pleasure or delight in their condition." (214)

"*Let them go, depart* from them, and *have nothing to do* with them. The others, however, whom you can snatch away, *save with fear. Deal in a friendly and gentle way* with them, just as God has dealt with you." (214)

"*Do not* use force, and *do not* be impetuous; but *treat them* as people lying in the fire. You must *pull them out* and *rescue* them with all care, reason, and diligence." (214)

"If they refuse to be snatched from the fire, one should *let them go* and *have compassion* on them, not burn them with fire and kill them, as the pope and the grand inquisitors do." (214)

"To be sure, we have received the Holy Spirit through faith, and we have become clean; but as long as we live here, that old sack, our flesh and blood, still clings to us; it does not cease from its wantonness. This is the spotted garment which *we must put aside and take off* as long as we live." (215)

## Gospel

**Promise for justifying grace.** "No one becomes pious and righteous by reason of his own works but solely through faith in Christ, in reliance on Christ's work as his chief treasure." (204)

"The message which has been given us concerning the grace of God and which holds Christ before us, how He, together with everything He has, has been offered and presented to us, so that we are delivered from sin, death, and all adversity." (204)

"To be sure, we have received the Holy Spirit through faith." (215)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "To build up means to increase from day to day in the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ. This is done through the Holy Spirit."

(214)

"Our life should be arranged in such a way that it is nothing else than a constant longing and waiting for the future life. Yet this waiting must be directed toward the mercy of Christ, so that we call upon Him in order that He may help us from this life into the life to come out of pure mercy, not through any work or merit." (214)

### **Matthew 11:25-30 (1525)**

Luther's 1525 sermon on Matthew 11:25-30 featured one instance of the first use, 16 of the second, and 13 of the third.<sup>9</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 17 times, 9 times in relation to the promise of justification, and the remaining instances in relation to sanctification.

#### **First Use**

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "God has abandoned them also to the lust and impurity of their hearts. . . . In short, this is just what happens wherever the devil is and wherever God's Word does not hold sway." (124)

#### **Second Use**

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "Christ is not speaking of [true] wisdom here, but rather of worldly wisdom, which puffs people up and will not admit the true, divine wisdom. This kind of fellow we all are by nature; we rebel against God's wisdom." (123)

"Human nature cannot do anything else but seek its own [cf. 1 Cor. 13:5]; what it likes and thinks is good, it considers the best. But what it does not like, it considers the worst, no matter how good it may be." (123)

"There is no end to [works righteousness], and it all comes from the fact that we will not let God's Word and the truth have the right of way, but we are always thinking up something new." (123)

"It is impossible for the natural man, who is made of flesh and blood and has not been instructed by God's Spirit, to judge and understand the things that belong to God." (124)

"[Romans 1 reveals] what blindness does and what punishment ensues when we neglect the Word of God, and follow our own inventions and ideas, all of which we see and, unfortunately, experience as true in our spirituals, monks, nuns, and priests." (124)

"The Gentiles . . . have changed the glory of the immortal God into an image which is like that of mortal man and birds and fourfooted animals and creeping things. This is

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<sup>9</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 121-32.

what our papists do too, but even more foolishly and stupidly." (124)

"Now this is not to be understood as applying only to the spirituals; it also applies to the common man, when he does not accept the Word of God. We see citizens dealing in counterfeit wares and merchants who are swindlers, and there is so much trickery and deceit, so much usury and taking of advantage that it is hardly possible to enumerate it all. And yet they go on doing it while having masses said and proving candles, thinking that God will allow himself to be propitiated in this way, concerned only that their reputation before the world remain untouched and unsullied, no matter what it is in the sight of God." (124-125)

"It is of these wise and understanding men that the Lord Christ is speaking here in the gospel, men who hear the gospel and see the miracles, but it does them no good for it does not enter their hearts." (125)

"The others are too wise, they do not want to learn anything from God, indeed they even presume to cavil at God's doctrine and works." (125)

"No sooner are we forsaken by God than immediately the devil is in us with his government. And such is life in that kingdom that nothing else can happen except vice and shame, and yet the devil is able to cover it up so masterfully with such fine shine and simulation that it is even looked upon as the holiest, indeed, an angelic, life." (126)

"[Christ] actually nullifies all human merit. Here no satisfactions can help, here no works have any validity whatsoever." (127)

"This is all spoken against the free will, which wants to know God and Christ whenever and however it pleases." (128)

"At first the gospel terrifies and is contrary to the flesh, for it says that all our efforts are nil, our holiness and goodness count for nothing, everything that is in us is condemned, we are children of wrath and indignation. And this is hard on the flesh, an intolerable burden; this is why he calls it a burden or yoke." (130)

"[Christ says,] I do not put people under the ban, like the Pharisees, who put people under the ban even on account of their own ordinances and human inventions, and would sooner have all the commandments of God broken than see one of their statutes and ordinances go unobserved. Just as we have seen in the papacy, that it was a far greater sin to eat meat on Friday or for a priest to marry than to commit twenty adulteries or even ten murders." (131)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "It is also true that no matter how one preaches to the people, sweetly or sourly, kindly or unkindly, they are still not satisfied." (122)

"If [being abandoned to lusts and impurity] happened among the heathen, who, after all, possessed many wives and whores, why should it be lacking among the spirituals, to whom women were forbidden?" (124)

### Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "God grant that the day may come when [the papists] will *repent* and let God have his honor." (124, implied imperative)

"Here the Lord calls "babes" the people who count their own works as nothing, who attribute nothing to their own wisdom, and make nothing whatsoever of themselves, but consider only God to be wise and prudent." (125, implied imperative)

"Here we are called to *come* to this consolation, to the gospel. Here you *must not think* about your worthiness." (129)

"So whoever feels his sinfulness and knows his inability to fulfil the law of God, let him *come confidently and boldly*; he will surely be helped." (129)

"But see to it only that you *believe* this friendly bidding and assurance." (129)

"I [Christ] do not preach: do this, do that; I preach the forgiveness of sins. I preach only that you should *receive*, not that you should give anything." (130-131)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "[The Gospel] excludes all merit; so *don't let it enter your mind* that you can earn anything here or brag about your works or your wisdom or your merits." (127)

"Therefore, every Christian, if he has accepted the gospel, may well *rejoice* that he is in the hands of this Christ and need not be troubled by his sins." (128)

"It will be hard for you, it will be bitter; therefore *prayer will be needed* and others too will have to pray for you, that you may have strong courage and a brave heart to withstand the devil." (128)

"Christ will surely save you. There is no need to worry, but only *do not fall* from his kingdom." (128)

"Even though they fall right back into sin, I [Christ] still do not cast them away from me, if only they *come* to me and *accept* comfort and help from me." (131)

"It may well be that there will be outward tribulation and physical persecution and calamity may befall you, but all this you should *bear easily and quietly*" (as he also says to his disciples in John." (131)

"Therefore, even though outwardly everything seems to be against us, as if it would crush and devour us, there is *no need to be troubled*; for inwardly, in our conscience, we have peace." (131, implied imperative)

### Gospel

**Promise for justifying grace.** "Why is it that the wise do not know them? Thou hast hidden them from them. But why do the babes know? Thou hast revealed them

to them." (126)

"The gospel is a good, joyful message which teaches me how to know God, through which knowledge I obtain the forgiveness of sins and eternal life." (126)

"This the Father has hidden from the wise and understanding, that they should know neither the Father nor the Son, and has revealed it to babes, that they might know the Father and the Son and thus have eternal life." (126)

"[Christ] actually nullifies all human merit. Here no satisfactions can help, here no works have any validity whatsoever. It is done only by the will and good pleasure of the Father." (127)

"The publicans and open sinners should go into the kingdom of God before [the externally righteous], and they, with all their holiness and beautiful, fine, glittering works, be excluded." (127)

"This is God's good pleasure; the one to whom He reveals it, has it, and the one from whom He hides it, it is hidden from him. There is nothing to be done about it." (127)

"[The Gospel] excludes all merit." (127)

"First he causes the gospel to be preached to us, then I believe this preaching, and as soon as I believe and accept this preaching the Holy Spirit is present and when the Holy Spirit is present my sins are forgiven." (130)

"[Jesus says:] I am gentle and lowly in heart. I do not terrify people, as Moses did. I do not preach: do this, do that; I preach the forgiveness of sins. I preach only that you should receive, not that you should give anything." (130-131)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "Every Christian, if he has accepted the gospel, may well rejoice that he is in the hands of this Christ and need not be troubled by his sins, if he has accepted the gospel, for Christ, under whom he lives, will carry on from there." (128)

"There is no need to be troubled, for he has a strong, mighty King; he will defend him well." (128)

"One thing is certain; you will not be forsaken. Christ will surely save you. There is no need to worry." (128)

"You "who labor and are heavy-laden," that is, with the law, with sin, with anxiety and affliction, and with whatever else may burden the conscience. That's why he does not give it any special name. He does not say, with this or that difficulty, but simply says, "all who labor and are heavy-laden." Nor will he have any one excluded, for he says "all"; which is an excellent and mighty comfort in temptation, no matter what temptation it may be. So whoever feels his sinfulness and knows his inability to fulfil the law of God, let him come confidently and boldly; he will surely be helped." (129)

"He not only refreshes us in the anxiety and assaults of sin, but he will be with us in all other troubles; in hunger, war, famine, and whatever other tribulations which may come, he will not leave us, as God never left the dear patriarch Joseph, even in a strange

country, but was always with him in prosperity as well as adversity. It is a heavy burden when a man is weighed down by sins, and no one will be relieved of this except those whom the Son of God, Christ Jesus, delivers through the Holy Spirit, whom he secured for us from the Father." (130)

"Even though they fall right back into sin, I [Christ] still do not cast them away from me, if only they come to me and accept comfort and help from me." (131)

"The yoke of the law, under which you have been living up to now, was heavy; but my yoke is not so heavy. It is a light and easy yoke, you can easily carry it. The wise fellows are still saying that Christ's yoke is heavier than the yoke of the law and they cite the fifth chapter of Matthew. But there Christ is explaining how the law is to be understood, not making laws." (132)

"[Christ's yoke] is called gentle, sweet, and easy because he himself helps us carry it, and when it grows too heavy for us he shoulders the burden along with us." (132)

### Sermon on the Catechism

Luther's first sermon on the catechism featured 2 instances of the first use, 11 of the second, and 28 of the third.<sup>10</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 6 times, once in relation to the promise of justification, and 5 times in relation to sanctification.

#### First Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "I have admonished you adults to hold your children and servants and yourselves to [learning the catechism]; otherwise *we shall not admit you to holy communion.*" (137)

"[God says,] fear nobody but me, for I can smite you." (139)

#### Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "One who does not know [the catechism] should not be counted among the number of Christians. For when a person does not know this, it is a sign that he has no regard for God and Christ." (137)

"One who does not know [the catechism] should not call himself a Christian, but belongs body and soul to the devil, and it will never go well with him here and hereafter." (138)

"If you won't learn [the Commandments], then you shall be of the devil." (138)

"All sorcerers transgress this first commandment; they neither trust God nor fear him." (139)

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<sup>10</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 137–41.

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "I should never have believed that you were such ignorant people if I did not learn it every day." (137)

"One who fears something else [other than God] and trusts it makes of it a god." (138)

"If you fear the prince more than God, then the prince is your god. If you trust your wife or money more than God, then these are your god." (139)

"To fear God is not merely to fall upon your knees. Even a godless man and a robber can do that. Likewise, when a monk trusts in his cowl and rule, this is idolatry." (139)

"It would only be a clod and a villain who would not be moved by this and worthy of being instructed by Jack Ketch [the hangman]." (140)

"The fault lies with us householders. Necessity has forced us to engage teachers because the parents have not assumed this responsibility." (140)

"[When your children learn the first Commandment] they will become fine people; otherwise they will grow up to be blockheads." (141)

### Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "The catechism . . . is, an instruction for children, which the children and all who want to be Christians *should know*." (137)

"I have admonished you adults to *hold your children* and servants and yourselves to [*learning the catechism*]; otherwise we shall not admit you to holy communion." (137)

"If I preach all year long and the crowd only comes in and looks at the walls and windows of the church, it is of no use." (137, implied imperative)

"A person who wants to be a good citizen owes it to his family to *urge* them to learn these portions of the catechism, and if they will not, *do not give them any bread to eat*. If the servants grumble, then *throw them out of the house*." (137)

"If you have children, *train* them to learn the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer." (137)

"When they have learned this, there are many excellent passages scattered throughout the Scriptures; these they *should learn* afterwards; if not all, at least some of them." (137)

"God has appointed you a master and a wife in order that *you should hold your family to this*." (137)

"You can do this easily enough by praying in the morning when you rise, in the evening when you go to bed, and before and after meals." (137, implied imperative)

"Therefore remember that you in your homes are to *help us* carry on the ministry as we do in the church." (137)

"The catechism . . . *must be taught* for the sake of the simple, that they may first learn to recite it word for word but then afterwards learn to understand it." (138)

"[The first commandment] *should be taught* to the children just as it stands in the words, 'I am your God,' or, 'You shall have no other gods before me.'" (138)

"We must *fear* God and *trust* him." (138)

"If you *fear* him and *trust* him then you need *fear no one and trust no one except God.*" (139)

"*Fear* God and *trust* him." (139)

"I should *fear and trust none but God.* If I do this I have the one God." (139)

"If you really fear him, then *fear and trust* him!" (139)

"When you hear a bishop preaching the Word of your God, then *fear and trust!* But if he is preaching not the Word of God but of the devil, let him pound, stamp, and curse and say: I do not fear you and I do not trust in you." (139)

"Then you must say: My God says that he wills to be gracious to me; him alone must I *fear and trust.*" (139)

"The first commandment requires that you *fear no one and trust no one except God alone,* who says: If you fear me and trust me, I will protect you and supply you with nourishment and all that you need and you shall have what is sufficient." (139)

"*Fear nobody but me,* for I can smite you, and *put your trust in none but me,* for I can help you." (139)

"Therefore *fear* me and *trust* in me!" (139)

"The Lord wills that we should *practice [the commandments] in all affairs* of the household, so that when a servant does wrong the master may say: Don't fear me, fear God!" (140)

"If you will not obey me, then *fear God and be obedient* for his sake. It is of no account that you be obedient for my sake, but *trust God and obey his commandment!*" (140)

"We probably think that the Ten Commandments are there only to be preached from the pulpit, but they need rather to *be applied* to use." (140)

"God has commanded you to *fear and trust* him." (140)

"[The young] must *fear God* if they are to cease from doing evil for his sake." (140)

"No matter how many people teach you to go contrary to the first commandment, *dismiss them and say,* I must fear and trust God more than you." (141)

"*Fear and trust* no one but God alone." (141)

## Gospel

**Promise for justifying grace.** "If we do this we shall have a gracious God, who will defend us from all evil and in all evil." (137)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "If they want to give you riches, you already have another treasure, which is trust in God alone." (139)

"If you fear me and trust me, I will protect you and supply you with nourishment and all that you need and you shall have what is sufficient." (139)

"Put your trust in none but me, for I can help you." (139)

"It is small wages when I give you three or four guldens, but God gives you a happy life here and, after that, eternal life." (140)

"He will richly reward you." (141)

## On the Cross and Suffering

Luther's sermon *On the Cross and Suffering* featured 2 instances of the first use, 6 of the second, and 24 of the third.<sup>11</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 17 times, 3 times in relation to the promise of justification, and 14 times in relation to sanctification.

### First Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "If you refuse to suffer you will also not become Christ's courtier." (199)

"He who does not believe will also receive none of these unspeakable goods and gifts." (200)

### Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "[Unbelievers] cannot endure even the small afflictions. But when the big, strong afflictions occur, they despair altogether, destroy themselves, or they want to jump out of their skin because the whole world has become too cramped for them." (201)

"Likewise they cannot observe moderation either in fortune or misfortune. When things go well, they are the most wanton, defiant, and arrogant people you can find. When

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<sup>11</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 197–208.

things go wrong, they are utterly shattered and despondent, more than any woman; . . . So it must be when one does not have the promises of God's Word." (201)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "[The fanatics] are wrong, not only with respect to their choosing their own cross, but also in that they flaunt their suffering and make a great merit of it and thus blaspheme God, because it is not a true suffering but a stinking, self-chosen suffering." (199)

"The flesh is utterly incapable of this art [of looking to God's Word during suffering], it sees no farther than the present suffering." (203)

"Now if merchants, knights, papists, and such riffraff can muster up such courage to take upon themselves and suffer such peril, effort, and labor, we should be simply ashamed that we rebel against suffering and the cross, even though we know, in the first place, that God has appointed that we should suffer and that it cannot be otherwise." (204-205)

"We see so many people, unfortunately it is all too common, so misusing the gospel that it is a sin and a shame, as if now of course they have been so liberated by the gospel that there is no further need to do anything, give anything, or suffer anything." (207)

### Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Our suffering and cross should never be so exalted that we think we can be saved by it or earn the least merit through it." (198, implied imperative)

"We should *suffer* after Christ, that we may be conformed to him." (198)

"God has appointed that we should not only *believe* in the crucified Christ, but also *be crucified* with him." (198)

"Each one must *bear* a part of the holy cross; nor can it be otherwise." (198)

"Every Christian must be aware that suffering will not fail to come." (198, implied imperative)

"What is needed is to *hold fast* and *submit* oneself to [suffering]." (199)

"We must suffer, in order that we may thus be confirmed to Christ." (199)

"Very well, if I want to be a Christian, I must also wear the colors of the court; the dear Christ issues no others in his court; suffering there must be." (199, implied imperative)

"None should dictate or choose his own cross and suffering, but rather, when it comes, patiently *bear* and *suffer* it." (199)

"Either *suffer* or deny Christ." (199)

"Furthermore, every Christian should *submit* himself to this suffering that he is sure that it will work for his good and that Christ, for his Word's sake, will not only help us to bear this suffering but also turn and transform it to our advantage." (200)

"When the suffering and affliction is at its worst, it bears and presses down so grievously that one thinks he can endure no more and must surely perish. But then if you can *think* of Christ, the faithful God will come and help you, as he has always helped his own from the beginning of the world; for he is the same God as he always has been." (200)

"Anybody who has taken upon himself the burden of the Christ, the beloved child, must either *carry* him all the way across the water or drown; there is no middle way." (202)

"This is the Christian art, which we must all *learn*, the art of looking to the Word and looking away from all the trouble and suffering that lies upon us and weighs us down." (203)

"*Drive* the suffering and cross from your heart and mind as quickly as you can; otherwise if you think about it for long the evil grows worse." (204)

"If you have affliction and suffering, *say*: I have myself not chosen and prepared this cross; it is because of the Word of God that I am suffering and that I have and teach Christ. So let it be in God's name." (204)

"In suffering and cross we should *look* to the Word and the comforting assurance, and trust them." (205)

"Therefore in affliction every Christian should so *arm* himself that he may *defend* and *guard* himself with the fine, comfortable assurances which Christ, our dear Lord, has left us when we suffer for his Word's sake." (205)

"When we stay with the Word and hold on to it, we shall certainly have the experience of conquering and coming out of it fine." (205, implied imperative)

"Let us *suffer* what comes upon us." (207)

"Therefore, since it is better to have a cross than to be without one, nobody should dread or be afraid of it." (207, implied imperative)

"We should *accept* all suffering as a holy thing, for it is true holiness." (208)

"Even though it hurts, so be it, you have to go through some suffering anyhow; things cannot always go smoothly." (208, implied imperative)

"You should also *accustom* yourself to distinguish carefully between the suffering of Christ and all other suffering and know that his is a heavenly suffering and ours is worldly." (208)

## Gospel

**Promise for justifying grace.** "Christ by his suffering . . . saved us from the devil, death, and sin." (198)

"[We have been given a] great, immeasurable gift, which is that Christ with his suffering and merit has become altogether ours. Thus the suffering of Christ has become so mighty and strong that it fills heaven and earth and breaks the power and might of the devil and

hell, of death and sin." (200)

"We do not make our suffering meritorious before God. No, far from it. Christ alone did that and nobody else, and to him along belongs the glory." (206)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "We earn nothing by our suffering . . . it is enough that we know that it pleases God that we suffer in order that we may be conformed to Christ." (199)

"Though I suffer long, very well then, what is that compared with that great treasure which my God has given to me, that I shall live eternally with him?" (200)

"What makes this cross more agreeable and bearable for us is the fact that our dear God is ready to pour so many refreshing and aromatics and cordials into our hearts that we are able to bear all our afflictions and tribulations." (200)

"The faithful God will come and will help you, as he has always helped his own from the beginning of the world; for he is the same God as he always has been." (200)

"We have the promise that he who has Christ and relies and believes on him can boldly say with David in Ps. 27, 'Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet will I be confident.'" (202-203)

"[We have a] promise that Christ will do something remarkable with our suffering." (203)

"Fear and trembling is not as great as the comfort and the promise." (203)

"[Christ has] promised me his divine and gracious help." (204)

"[We've been given] the Word and the fine strong promises that we shall not be overwhelmed by the waves." (204)

"They will not demolish the Word." (205)

"God prevents [our enemies] from striking us." (206)

"The small, weak, miserable Word is stronger than the devil and the gates of hell." (207)

"God will stand by us to guard and shield us against this enemy and all his adherents." (207)

"His suffering accomplishes everything, while ours does nothing except that we become conformed to Christ." (208)

### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14**

Luther's sermon on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 featured 1 instance of the first use, 2 of the second, and 26 of the third.<sup>12</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 17

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<sup>12</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 231–43.

times, 10 times in relation to the promise of justification, and 7 times in relation to sanctification.

### First Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Therefore humble yourself and improve your life, that you, like [the deceased Elector] may be among those who suffer and die with Christ." (243)

### Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Such a hard heart, which is not softened when a good friend dies, shows that he never did have any real liking or love for him, or he wants to be a hypocrite and appear to be so firm before men that they will praise him and say: Ah, there's a man who has a firm hold on himself!" (232)

"You know that we are all wicked, ungrateful villains and that the people, young and old, are so utterly wanton that there is no longer any discipline or fear. If now our Lord God so manifests himself and takes away the head, not even sparing a prince, he is surely giving you to understand that this means you." (243)

### Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "[Christians] are *not to sorrow* as others do who have no hope." (232)

"It is right and fitting, even godly, to mourn a good friend who has died." (232, implied imperative)

"Why should not we too properly mourn and grieve because our head, the beloved sovereign, lies here dead?" (232, implied imperative)

"You must *discriminate* between your death and the death of the heathen, between your sorrow and that of the heathen." (233)

"Thus [Paul] attributes to the death of Christ such exceeding power that by comparison we should *consider* our death a sleep." (234)

"This is the right way to give comfort, to *take* the death which we suffer as far as possible from our eyes, at least according to the spirit, and *look* straight at the death of Christ." (234)

"*Look* at him who is really dead, compared with whom all the other dead are as nothing. They did not die, but he died." (234)

"We should also *grieve* over Christ's death." (234)

"*Look* to this death and mingle, yea, *cover* with the death of Christ all other human deaths, and so *magnify* this death that other deaths are only a sleep compared with it." (234)

"*Be of good courage* and *cheer up*, for if this is true there is no need to sorrow over those who have fallen asleep." (235)

"*Lay hold* of this article that Christ died and rose again, when we are in distress and there is sorrow and grief." (235)

"Beloved, *look not* at this dead body; you have something higher and better to contemplate, namely, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." (235)

"We must *learn* to *look* at the death of Christ, through which our death is destroyed." (235)

"One buries the body in all dishonor; this is true, but *don't look* at that, for it will rise again in all glory." (236)

"*Learn* to see the dead, not lying in the grave and coffin, but in Christ." (236)

"We shall not look upon [the Elector] according to his temporal death, but according to Christ's death and his spiritual death, which he died in accord with Christ." (237, implied imperative)

"If along with this there should be something lacking in his personal life [in government], we shall *let this pass*, for we . . . *praise* the fact that he confessed Christ's death and resurrection, by which He swallowed up death and hell and all sins, and remained steadfast in this confession." (237)

"*Do not look* so steadily at your death, but *look* at the fact that my Son died for you and the fact that you have already been spiritually killed." (239)

"*Reckon* our beloved sovereign among those who sleep in Jesus Christ, but especially because he did not depart from the confession of the death and resurrection of Christ, but suffered all manner of injury and affront for it." (239)

"*Hold on* to this cloak and *wrap* ourselves in the death of the Son of God and *cover* and *veil* ourselves with his resurrection." (239)

"One must *look* upon a Christian death with different eyes . . . by learning to speak and think of it as the Scriptures do and not considering deceased Christians to be dead and buried people." (239-240)

"*Go beyond* them and *listen* to what St. Paul says here, that they are sleeping in Christ and God will bring them with Christ." (240)

"*Learn to comfort* yourselves with these words and *instil* [sic] in your hearts the fact that it is far more certain that Duke John of Saxony will come out of the grave and be far more splendid than the sun is now." (240)

"Let us *comfort* ourselves now in this sorrow with the fact that we know with certainty that he will rise again with Christ." (240)

"*Take care* not to let anybody persuade you of this on your deathbed." (241)

"*Learn to say*: Devil, you're coming at the wrong time. No devil is going to argue with me now, but rather I shall talk with my Lord Jesus Christ, that I may learn that he suffered for me and died and rose again for my sins, and that God will bring me with him on the last day." (242)

"Swiftly *fling out* that defiance and boast, not of yourself or your righteousness, but of the fact that Jesus Christ died and rose again for you." (242)

## **Gospel**

**Promise for justifying grace.** "Christ died as no one else dies or ever will die." (234)

"My death and your death will not have the bitterness which Christ's death had because he is immeasurably different from all other dead, in himself and by reason of his person." (234)

"Christ's death and resurrection . . . covers and swallows up the multitude of sins as the great ocean swallows a spark of fire. Therefore all other sins are as nothing compared with this one thing, that Christ's death and resurrection be not denied, but openly confessed." (237)

"I make haste to seize hold of the article of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for my sins." (241)

"I comfort myself with the fact that Jesus Christ died and rose again." (241)

"I have the greatest treasure, namely, the death of Christ and the power which it has wrought." (241)

"Jesus Christ died." (241)

"Even though I have sinned, it doesn't matter." (241)

"He suffered for me and died and rose again." (242)

"No matter how much sin I have committed, even more than ten worlds can commit, I still know that Christ's death and resurrection is far greater." (242)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "If you gaze steadfastly at this mirror and image, at Christ the Lord, who died and rose again, you will see where you will go and where those will go who have not fallen asleep in Christ, namely, that God intends to bring with him you and all others who have been baptized and have fallen asleep in Christ, because he has wrapped them in Christ's death and included them in his resurrection and does not intend to leave them lying under the ground, even though for our reason and five senses there is no reason why this should be so, in order that faith may find room and we learn to trust God even in that which we do not see." (235)

"One buries the body in all dishonor; this is true, but don't look at that, for it will rise again in all glory. It is buried and sown as something perishable and it will rise up imperishable. It is sown in weakness and will rise in power. It is sown a natural body and will rise a spiritual body." (236)

"He will bring us with Christ. So anyone who can believe this will have good comfort in his own death and the death of other people." (236)

"God cannot lie." (240)

"I have his dear baptism, his gospel, his Word and sacraments, to which I have been called and which I have confessed before the whole world. These seals and letters cannot fail me, any more than God himself can fail me. If some few sins should occur, such as living and doing wrongly, these nevertheless will not count, in order that Christ's death and resurrection may be prized beyond my sin and the sin of the whole world." (242)

"If you believe this, then be bold and assured that he will bring you with Christ, and as you have heard that Christ is risen, so you too will rise again." (242)

"This will be the end of all who believe in the death and resurrection of Christ and confess the same; they will finally rise with him and be brought with Christ." (243)

### **1 Peter 4:7-11**

Luther's sermon on 1 Peter 4:7-11 featured 4 instances of the first use, 15 of the second, and 35 of the third.<sup>13</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted twice, once in relation to the promise of justification, and once in relation to sanctification.

#### **First Use**

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "Christ says that the coming last day will come upon men unawares and snatch them away (Luke 21[:35]), and Paul says the same thing in 1 Thess. 5[:2], and also the prophets likewise." (291)

"If you do not wish to conduct yourself this way, if you are going to go beyond this and be a born pig and guzzle beer and wine, then, if this cannot be stopped by the rulers, you must know that you cannot be saved. For God will not admit such piggish drinkers into the kingdom of heaven [cf. Gal. 5:19-21]." (293)

"Do not think that you are saved if you are a drunken pig day and night. This is a great sin, and everybody should know that this is such a great iniquity, that it makes you guilty and excludes you from eternal life. Everybody should know that such a sin is contrary to his baptism and hinders his faith and his salvation." (293-294)

"Consider what Solomon said: "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses" [Prov. 10:12]. This is how you should deal with your neighbor. If you do not do this, [Christ]

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<sup>13</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 291–99.

will remove his cover." (298)

## Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "In [Greece] there was gluttony just as in Germany today." (291)

"Where one can find sermons which will stop the Germans from swilling I do not know." (291)

"Italians call us gluttonous, drunken Germans and pigs because they live decently and do not drink until they are drunk. Like the Spaniards, they have escaped this vice. Among the Turks it is really the worst sin for a man to be drunk. So temperate are they that they do not even drink anything which inebriates. That is why they can make war and win; while we drunken sows sleep they keep awake, and thus can consider their strategy and then attack and conquer. When the time comes for us to defend ourselves and be prepared, we get drunk. This has become so widespread that there is no help for it; it has become a settled custom." (292)

"Those who should stop [becoming drunk] do it themselves; the princes even more. Therefore Germany is a land of hogs and a filthy people which debauches its body and its life. If you were going to paint it, you would have to paint a pig." (292)

"Some spark of sobriety may remain among young children, virgins, and women, though underneath one finds pigs among them too." (292)

"The gluttony and swilling is inundating us like an ocean and among the Spaniards, Italians and English it is reprehended. We are the laughingstock of all other countries, who look upon us as filthy pigs; and not only upon private persons, but upon nobles and princes also, as if that were the reason why they bear the coat of arms. We would not forbid this; it is possible to tolerate a little elevation, when a man takes a drink or two too much after working hard and when he is feeling low. This must be called a frolic. But to sit day and night, pouring it in and pouring it out again, is piggish. This is not a human way of living, not to say Christian, but rather a pig's life." (293)

"We preach and the Holy Scriptures teach us otherwise; but you want to evade what is taught." (293)

"It is no wonder that all of you are beggars." (293)

"It is now becoming a custom even in evangelical cities to establish taprooms; a donkey goes in, pays a penny [Groschen], and drinks the whole day long; and the government does nothing about it." (295)

"When a man is drunk his reason is buried, his tongue and all his members are incapable of praying; he is a drunken pig and the devil has devoured his members." (295)

"There is no moderation in these things [dress, drinking, etc.]. When there is a wedding or a dance you always have to go to excess. Christmas and Pentecost mean nothing but beer." (296)

"We Germans are especially swamped in this vice. The Italians and the Turks far surpass

us in moderation. The Turk should be put to shame by us and he should be the one to say: They do not overeat, overdrink, and overdress. But actually the tables are turned; they are the ones who give us an example in clothing, etc. . . . We are a shame to heaven and earth; we do harm to both body and mind." (296-297)

"People today, peasants, citizens, and nobles, go on living in hatred and envy, so that none will give another even a piece of bread; they will commit any kind of rascality so long as they can deny it." (297)

"If you are a Christian, your neighbor will not make you so angry that you would do him injury. If you do, then there is no love." (298)

"If you despise parents, magistrates, preaching, you are really despising God." (299)

### Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Those who are Christians are to *see to it* that they are grateful for grace and redemption and *conduct themselves modestly, moderately, and soberly*, so that one does not go on living the swinish life that goes on in the filthy world." (291)

"If it ill becomes the children and young women, so that we say that such should be trampled under foot, how much more *should not this be so* of married women and particularly men, who *should be wiser and more virtuous*, since the woman is the weaker vessel [1 Pet. 3:7] and the man has more strength and reason? Therefore *they should do this even less*, and therefore, according to reason, it is a far more shameful thing for men to drink to excess than for women." (292)

"*Listen to the Word of God*, which says, "Keep sane and sober," that it may not be said to you in vain." (293)

"*You must not be pigs*; neither do such belong among Christians." (293)

"Therefore, if you wish to be a Christian, take care that you *control yourself*." (294)

"But if you do want to be saved, then *listen to this*: just as adultery and idolatry close up heaven, so does gluttony; for Christ says very clearly: Take heed "lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly" [Luke 21:34], "as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west" [Matt. 24:27]." (294)

"Therefore, *be watchful and sober*. That is what is preached to us, who want to be Christians." (294)

"You parents must help to *see to it* that your children do not begin too early to fall into this vice." (294)

"What *should move you* is that God forbids it on pain of damnation and loss of the kingdom of heaven." (294)

"We ought to *thank* God for providing us with food and drink and then besides, liberating us from the papacy, and feeding us with food and drink." (294)

"Just because the magistrates and princes do not denounce and punish these vices, *we shall not fail* to perform our office and remind each one of his office. If we are aware of what is going on we know that such persons *should be excluded* from all the sacraments and you will make it public, just as we would in the case of a murderer." (295)

"*You should be moderate and sober*; this means that we should not be drunken, though we may be exhilarated." (295)

"*You must defend yourself* with the Word and with prayer, not only for yourselves but the whole world." (295)

"We have established the schools in order that morning and evening prayers may be held morning and evening. *This we are obliged to do.*" (296)

"*Do not make a pig of yourself*; remain a human being. If you are a human being, then *keep your human self-control.*" (296)

"We should nevertheless *be ashamed* that we are thus spit upon by other peoples." (296)

"If you want to be a Christian, *do not argue* in this way: Nobody reproaches me, therefore God does not reproach me." (296)

"The mind will tolerate a certain degree of elevation, but this *must be moderate*, not indecent." (296)

"If you have been a pig, then *stop being one.*" (296)

"'Sane' means that *we should be alert and sensible*, in order that we may be enlightened by the Word of God and *not be drunken pigs*, in order that we may be ready for prayer. 'Sober' means that *we should not overload the body*, and it applies to excess in outward gestures, clothing, ornament, or whatever kind of pomp it may be, such as we have at baptisms and the churching of women." (296)

"Christians *should not walk around so bedizened* that one hardly knows whether one is looking at a man or a beast." (296)

"We Christians *ought to be examples.*" (296)

"'Above all.' This could well be a sermon in itself. You have been called to *love one another.*" (297)

"If you want to be saved, *you must possess the red dress* which is here described. You have put on the vestment. You are white as snow [Isa. 1:18], pure from all sins. But *you must wear this red dress and color now*, and remember to love your neighbor. Moreover, it *should be a fervent love*, not a pale-red love, not the love which is easily provoked to revenge [1 Cor. 13:5]. *It should be a strong color*, a brown-red love, which is capable not only of doing good toward your neighbor but is also able to bear all malice from him [1 Cor. 13:4, 7]." (297)

"In Christianity it *must not happen* that one person should hurt another." (297)

"*You must have a strong love*, which is best able to cover up sins." (298)

"Consider what Solomon said: "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses" [Prov. 10:12]. This *is how you should* deal with your neighbor." (298)

"You *must not become angry* and be ready to do harm." (298)

"*Be content* if someone possesses the same thing you have and do not be envious." (298)

"If anybody speaks against you, you *say*: May God forgive him." (298)

"Magistrates, teachers, and parents *must chastise*, but this chastisement is fatherly and kingly." (298)

"If you are a husband, a preacher, or a magistrate, *learn* not to say: Oh if I were that fellow; he has the silver chain [a symbol of authority]. Rather look to the station to which you have been called." (299)

"Nobody *should undertake* to do anything unless he knows with certainty that he can say: Here is the Word of God." (299)

"A servant *should think* in this way: I am not obeying man, but God." (299)

"Very much *needs to be preached* concerning [drunkenness] to check the abuses which the devil has introduced." (299)

## Gospel

**Promise for justifying grace.** "It is another's love, namely, Christ's love, which has covered my sins, as Peter says in chapter two: He bore them in his body on the cross and erased them completely. This is sad with regard to your sins, the sins you commit against me and I against you." (297)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "The Holy Spirit has sanctified you through faith and given you love, in order that you may bear with others. Christ has borne your sins, in order that you may bear with the sins of others." (298)

## Revelation 12:7-12

Luther's sermon on Revelation 12:7-12 featured 2 instances of the first use, 5 of the second, and 19 of the third.<sup>14</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 16 times, 9 times in relation to the promise of justification, and 7 times in relation to sanctification.

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<sup>14</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 58, *Sermons V*, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2010), 173–86.

## First Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "The heretic Arius was one such pernicious angel of the devil in the church at Alexandria, where he spread his poison and lies. Through him, many Christians were deceived and almost the whole world was poisoned—for he denied this Prince Michael [i.e., Jesus], saying that He was not God's Son by nature or of the same origin and essence as the Father. Here Christ appeared to be weak, and the devil became so strong through his angel that almost all bishops and churches were of his party except for a few holy bishops, such as Hilary and Athanasius, who fought and resisted him so that the [true] article was believed and pure churches preserved in few places." (182)<sup>15</sup>

"Some fall away—those who let the Word be taken from their hearts." (183)

## Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "So shamefully do people oppose the holy Gospel that the more one preaches, the worse they become, and the weaker faith is among us." (184)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Whoever does not sincerely believe this article [the incarnation] and take pleasure in it above all things on earth, and find consolation, joy, and delight in it—such a person, I say will never become learned in the Scriptures. Indeed, he understands nothing about creation, either, and it would be better for him if he had never heard anything of the Scriptures." (174)

"Whether this [old story about a demon rebuking someone for not bowing before Christ] actually took place or was made up by good people, its purpose was to show what accursed and devilish arrogance it is that we are such shameful people and so little heed this article, which is our highest treasure and honor." (174)

"The fact that we do not take heartfelt joy and delight in [the work of Christ] is a sign that it does not enter our hearts as it should." (184)

"Thus it now" (praise God!) resounds and is heard, even though, sadly, few are improved by it or thankful for it." (185)

## Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "One must *learn* and *believe* this foundation above all else: that God's Son is truly man, that He became our blood and flesh and thus highly honored our nature above all other creatures." (174)

"You must *believe* that [Christ] became man and sacrificed Himself for you, and *confess*

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<sup>15</sup>The purpose of this story is to warn his hearers of the pervasiveness and seduction of error. Therefore, it fits as an example of the law in its first use to restrain sin.

this with your mouth [Rom. 10:9-10]." (185)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Here he names two kingdoms, and yet they are really one kingdom. . . . He governs in this life, drawing a veil in front of our eyes so that we cannot see Him, but rather *must believe*." (175)

"You *should not and must not believe* that the devil is in heaven among the blessed angels, for soon after the beginning of the world, he fell from there, after which the human race also fell from Paradise." (176-177)

"We *should know* that we who are baptized are truly saved and set in heaven, where God's Son Himself rules, except that the battle still goes on here" (because we live by faith and not by sight [2 Cor. 5:7]), and the devil is among the sons of God [Job 1:6], as he was also in the beginning in Paradise, and here he wages war against the Word, Sacrament, Baptism, and everything that belongs to Christ." (179)

"We who bear God's Word *should take heart*, expecting no peace here, but rather *remembering* that we are soldiers who *must be on the battlefield*. Indeed, we must always *stand armed* for battle, since when one war stops, another one immediately begins." (180)

"Here the angels of the Lord Christ [i.e., Christians] *must not relax or grow slack* on their part, but rather *strike* with confidence in the midst of the devil and his army and gain the upper hand against him 'through the word of their testimony.'" (181)

"Thus, if you want to be a good soldier of Christ, you must *arm yourself* with courage and good cheer and *slash* and *shoot* at the devil with God's Word and your confession, bringing his lies and deceptions to nothing and undermining his kingdom." (181)

"We *must take our stand* under the banner of this Lord through our faith and confession." (181)

"We also have a warning *not to be careless*, as if the devil were far removed from us." (182)

"So we must also *be watchful and alert* against this dragon and his heretics and sects, who multiply even where we are." (182)

"Therefore, *do not think* that the devil is only in hell or over in Babylon or only in Turkey or in Rome with the pope and his cardinals and bishops." (183)

"*Look out* and *watch* for the enemy and defend yourselves against his angels. For he is not far from you." (183)

"Whoever, then, wants to be a Christian should *arm* and *prepare* himself, so that he can *guard* against the devil's arrows and barbs and *fight* and *strike out* against him bravely and confidently under this great Michael, the Lord Christ." (184)

"Therefore, [the text] exhorts you now to *give such praise and thanks*. "Rejoice, you heavens," that is, you Christians, for yours is the kingdom of the Lord, and you dwell in His heaven." (185)

"You must believe that [Christ] became man and sacrificed Himself for you, and confess

this with your mouth [Rom. 10:9-10] and also *teach* others to hold fast to this Word and faith." (185)

"Christians must be willing to *lay down their lives* on account of this victory, as it says: 'they did not love their lives even unto death' [Rev. 12:11]." (186)

"Whoever believes, preaches, and confesses this article *must suffer persecution* on earth, as has happened at all times in Christendom because of the devil." (186)

"Therefore, one must *stand fast* and *persevere* here in faith and confession through life and death, until the devil is utterly cast out through the power and the victory of this Savior, Christ." (186)

## Gospel

**Promise for justifying grace.** "This book teaches only the Son of God, who was born of the Father from eternity and sent into the world, becoming our flesh and blood from the seed of David and out of the body of the Virgin." (173-174)

"All those who are baptized and believe that God's Son became a human being like us are already in the kingdom of heaven." (175)

"When you hear them preach that you should be baptized and believe in the Son of God, who became man and died for you, then you are, without doubt, in heaven already, and nothing is lacking, except that you are waiting until He comes to you visibly." (175-176)

"There is in the eternal, heavenly realm one true God yet three persons, one of whom is God's Son, who became man and died for us, and now rules at the right hand of God." (176)

"God's Son, as Lord and Creator, has been gathering to Himself from the beginning of the world a small flock out of the great multitude of the human race, which the devil cast into sin and holds captive in sin. That is Christ's own kingdom, given to Him by the Father. That is why He came from heaven into our flesh and blood so that He might bring us into the eternal kingdom of His father." (177)

"Whoever can believe that Jesus Christ, God's Son, who is equal to God the Father and is His eternal, essential image, has truly become man like us and has come so close to us that He makes us His angels and is Himself the true Archangel and chief Prince; who goes before me and fights with me; who Himself baptizes me, absolves me, and gives me His flesh and blood through the hand and mouth of the priest, and gives, in addition, the Holy Spirit—whoever can believe this, what can the devil with his angels and all of hell do to harm him?" (183)

"He cannot be overcome or struck down with works-righteousness, sad countenances, or an impressive strict life, as the monks attempted to do. Rather, the blood of this little Lamb of God must surge in your heart." (185)

"To be a Christian is nothing other than to be baptized in the blood of the Son of God and to be saved from the power of sin and hell through his death and resurrection." (186)

"The entire Scriptures tell of this, and everything in them has to do with this Son of God,

who became man for us and spilled His blood that He might trample the devil with his infernal army, and weapons of sin, death, and hell under our feet and take us at His joyous coming out of the battle of faith to the enteral safety and glory of seeing." (186)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "Preaching and faith must cease, and the veil must be removed, so that we will be eternally blessed with the dear angels in the vision of God, which we possess here only in hearing and faith." (175)

"God's Son . . . saves and sanctifies His Christians through the Holy Spirit." (176)

"He conducts His government not above in heaven among the holy angels, where there is no need for battle, but rather here in the midst of His Church on earth. Although He sits at the right hand of the Father, He Himself is also at the head of His troops against the enemy, whom no human power or weapons can resist. He curbs and controls him through the Word that He has given them." (180)

"Christ, God's Son, is truly with His Church—that possesses and believes His Word." (182)

"He is not far from you." (183)

"We have a Lord who has sufficient angels and power, who is called the Lord of hosts and the true victor over the dragon, and who stands by us and fights for us." (183)

"What else do I need if I possess God's Son? What more could He do for me or how could He come closer to me than by becoming my flesh and blood, by being so near to me now that He dwells with me, feeds me, baptizes me, exhorts me, rebukes me?" (183)

### **Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14**

Luther's sermon on the promises in Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14 featured 3 instances of the second use and 9 of the third.<sup>16</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 19 times, 17 times in relation to the promise of justification, and twice in relation to sanctification.

#### **Second Use**

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "Though all human beings are sinners, they do not all understand what sin is." (156)

"Coarse, insolent people know nothing about this sting. They go their way in security and do not feel what sin and death are until death has devoured and swallowed them completely." (157)

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<sup>16</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 58: 148–60.

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Death reigns through sin and has power and authority over all human beings. Therefore, there is no man—be he emperor, king, prince, or lord, no matter how rich, great, or strong he may be—but he must yield. Death has become his lord." (152)

### Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "Now, if we believe that He sits at God's right hand and sends us the Holy Spirit, then we *must also believe* that we will rise from the dead just as He has risen." (149)

"We *must believe this*, for to this we are called through the Gospel, relying upon this we are baptized, upon this we receive Absolution and the holy Sacrament of the body and blood of Christ." (150)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "If we *believe* that Christ is risen, then we will surely follow Him and rise from the dead as well." (149, implied imperative)

"Therefore, Christ sits at the right hand of God and pours out His Holy Spirit over us in order to draw us to Himself; and we are to *follow Him* and rise from the dead with Him." (149, implied imperative)

"Therefore, when we Christians read this in the Bible and Holy Scripture, we *should heartily thank* our dear God for this treasure, *receive* such promise with joy, *ground ourselves* firmly upon it, *sing* this song against the victory of death with joyful hearts, and *joyfully await* the Last Day as our final redemption." (154)

"We are to *believe* this Word." (159)

"If the Law attacks us and says, 'You have done such and such,' and wants to bring us into death through sin, then we are to *cling to Christ* and say: 'Yes, I am a sinner, but I believe in Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for me indeed, who for my sake rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of God and intercedes for me.'" (159)

"Therefore, Christians *defy Law, sin, and death* with a confident spirit and a strong faith and say: 'I know of no sin.'" (160)

"Let us *thank Him* from the bottom of our hearts, here on earth and there in heaven, for such surpassing grace and favor, granted to us in Christ." (160)

### Gospel

**Promise for justifying grace.** "God's Son became man in order to blot out sin and redeem from death." (148)

"It is from Christ's resurrection that Adam, Eve, and all the saints from the beginning of the world until now receive the strength and power to rise." (148)

"Because we have the Word . . . we are certain that we have already risen with Christ

according to the soul, and on the Last Day will also rise with him according to the body." (149)

"If Christ has risen from the dead for our sakes and become the firstfruits of those who sleep, then our salvation stands firm and we, too, shall rise from the dead and keep the joyous Easter with Him on the Last Day." (149)

"We who believe in Christ will also ascend into heaven for Christ was lifted up on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven in order that He might give eternal life to those who believe in Him." (150)

"In Christ, all is fulfilled, as He Himself says on the cross: "It is all finished." But we also are part of this, for everything that has been done through Christ has been done for our sake." (150)

"Our Lord God will remove this covering and shroud. That is, he will make the dead to live, in the resurrection of the dead, "for He will swallow up death forever" so that death will be no more, but there will be only life. The Lord of hosts will accomplish this, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ, Mary's Son, true God, praised eternally." (151)

"Now this word is always and continually being fulfilled, for death is being swallowed up and perishes so far as the soul is concerned through the Gospel and through faith in Christ. However, on that day it will be completely fulfilled, for death will be swallowed up and will perish according to the body as well as through the resurrection of the flesh. To be sure, it was fulfilled fifteen hundred years ago and completed in Christ, but on that day it will also be fulfilled and completed in us." (151)

"Christ, the Lord of hosts, being raised from the dead—since it was impossible that He should be held by death (Acts 2:24)—has swallowed up death utterly and entirely, so that life reigns and triumphs over death. The tyranny and kingdom of death end in Christ. Death is defeated and swallowed up in life. Death has lost and will never rise again. Life conquers, is victorious, raises its hand and says: 'Victory! Victory!'" (152)

"The second victory is of life, which reigns in and through Christ and is victorious over death. . . . This is the victory and triumph of life: that in Christ life reigns and triumphs over death, and death is unable to hold not only Christ but also all who are baptized into Christ and believe in Him." (152)

"Death will soon sing himself hoarse and to death. Soon he will be forbidden to sing this cantata. For on Easter another song was begun that sings: 'Christ is arisen/ From the grave's dark prison. / So let our joy rise full and free; / Christ our comfort true shall be.' Death, where is your victory now? Where now do you have the One who lay in the grave and whom you killed on the cross?" (153)

"He speaks to the dead as if they were already alive. By this he wants to show that the resurrection from the dead is certain." (154)

"On that day we will have the victory in our bodies as well, from everlasting to everlasting, so that life shall rule and reign over death eternally." (155)

"We have the victory because God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has conquered death, and the Father has given us victory over death's victory through His Son." (155)

"The sting or spear of death shall be removed. Death shall be disarmed through Christ's resurrection so that it no longer possesses sting or spear." (155)

"We have the victory through Jesus Christ, who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was made man, suffered death on the cross for us, descended into hell, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven; destroyed sin, death, and hell in His body; fulfilled the Law perfectly and entirely and stopped its mouth so that it must stop accusing and condemning us. This is the victory: that death has lost its sting. The Law can no longer awaken sin, nor can sin any longer make death strong, for Christ has atoned for our sin and has erased the handwriting, the Law, setting it aside and nailing it to the cross." (159)

"Death is swallowed up in victory. Sin is utterly and entirely dead and done away with. Hell is entirely extinguished and destroyed. Eternal praise and thanks be to God!" (160)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "Christ sits at the right hand of God and pours out His Holy Spirit over us." (149)

"If I have sinned, I believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son, who is in heaven and feels neither death nor the sting of death (sin), nor the power of sin" (the Law), but has conquered all that for my good. Even though my body dies, it does not matter. The soul does not die and the body will also rise again from the grave in its own time." (160)

#### **Hebrews 13:4**

Luther's sermon on Hebrews 13:4 featured 5 instances of the first use, 10 of the second, and 28 of the third.<sup>17</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 9 times, all in relation to the promise of sanctification.

#### **First Use**

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "Here it is written: "God will judge the immoral and adulterous." (361)

"Here is pronounced the judgment that no whoremonger or adulterer will escape God's judgment." (365)

"But the immoral and adulterous, who live outside of this state in defilement and impurity, such as the pope and cardinals, bishops, canons, monks, nuns, etc., who forbid marriage and themselves engage in all kinds of abominable lust and vileness and so woefully befoul the holy estate of matrimony, God will judge on that day." (366)

"The pope and his rabble will wither like the grass of the field or quickly vanish away like a bubble." (367)

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<sup>17</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 357–67.

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "God does not leave everything until that glorious day of Christ, but also punishes here in this life. . . . Our dear Lord God and Father in heaven does not grant and bestow upon them a long life, or at least very seldom, and few old people are to be found in convents, simply because they rage and rant against God's holy ordinance and violently tear it down and abominably befoul it." (366)

## Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "The pope and his cardinals, monks, nuns, and priests have tried to improve things and ordain a holy estate in which they might live in holiness and chastity. But how holy, pure, and chaste the lives of popes, cardinals, bishops, monks, priests, and nuns have been is so apparent that the sun, moon, and stars have cried against it. Pigsties are nasty, dirty places, but they are clean and pure compared with the cloisters; for they have been leading such a chaste and pure life in the cloisters that one cannot very well even speak of it." (360)

"Here let the pope, cardinals, monks, nuns, and priests pull a sour face; what do we care about that? If they will not look at us with friendly and pure eyes, then let them look at the whorehouses and the impure, filthy, and befouled cloisters." (360)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "What a proper fool you are; why do you vow what you neither know nor keep?" (362)

"If you are able to remain chaste and be pure by your own strength, why then do you vow to be chaste?" (362)

"Do you want to know to whom you have vowed to keep chastity? I'll tell you: the miserable devil in hell and his mother." (362)

"Therefore it will not do for you to try and defend yourself by pointing to your vow of chastity, which you are not able to keep. If you have vowed it, you have vowed it to the devil, and you are not obliged to keep it, for it is against God." (363)

"This binding and this vowing to keep chastity and remain unmarried is something new, invented and devised by the devil and the miserable monks, the defamers of God's ordinance and the holy estate of matrimony." (363)

"It would be a dishonor if parents lived together unmarried." (364)

"Those who bring forth children outside of marriage are parents too, it is true; but there is no honor in it." (364)

"It will be no help [for opponents of marriage] to boast and appeal to their vows; for they are the real, true adulterers, who prevent marriage and forbid people to be married." (365-366)

## Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "We shall not go on

living so casually from day to day, like the heathen and dumb brutes who neither ask nor think about these things, but simply go on interbreeding and cohabiting promiscuously. No, among Christians it *must not* be so." (358)

"As St. Paul says in 1 Thess. 4[:3-5], 'This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you *abstain* from immorality; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God.'" (358)

"Therefore, Christians *should live in sanctification*, not like swine and animals, nor like the heathen, who neither regard nor honor this estate." (358)

"Therefore, all men *should marry and be married*, and since through the fall of our first parents we have been so spoiled that we are not all fit for marriage, yet those who are not fit for the married state should so live that they *walk chastely and honorably* and give offense to no one, though at the beginning it was not so and all were fit to become married." (359)

"For the married state *should not be forbidden* to anyone who is competent to be married, but should be free and open to everyone." (359)

"And this estate *should not be condemned* and rejected as something foul and unclean, as the pope and his followers do." (359)

"When God created man and woman, he himself placed them in this estate in which they not only could but *should live godly, honorable, pure, and chaste lives, bearing children and peopling the world*, indeed, the kingdom of God." (359)

"Those who have entered into holy matrimony in accord with God's ordinance should *love and esteem* this saying of St. Paul: "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, etc." (360)

"They should also *pride themselves* upon and *comfort themselves* with the fact that they are married." (360)

"Therefore, *nobody should hate or condemn* this estate and ordinance of God, as the pope and his followers do, but rather *exalt* it and *love and esteem* it." (360)

"God wants the priests to *be married* and thus to live purely in the marriage estate." (361, implied imperative)

"Therefore, those who are married should *be cheerful and confident and grateful* to God that they are in an estate which has been ordained and blessed by God, of sure hope and assurance that God will keep his ordinance and blessing, regardless of whether it annoys the devil, the pope in Rome, and therefore prompts them to condemn this estate." (361)

"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.' *Hold fast* to that, those of you who are married." (362)

"If our dear God and Father in heaven grants you children, *nurture and care* for them, *raise them up* in the discipline, fear, and admonition of the Lord." (363)

"Therefore we also lead brides and grooms to the church, in order that they may publicly confess that they are entering into the holy estate of matrimony . . . they [should] have no

doubt that they are blessed by God. But *they must take care that they remain blessed and lead their married life as married persons should, God-fearingly, purely, and unblemished, then they will remain blessed.*" (363-364)

"Now we know what the marriage estate is, namely the creation and ordinance of God, and what is essential to it, namely, a man and a wife. Therefore it should also *be considered pure* by all men." (364)

"We, who are Christians and children of God through faith in Christ, should also *honor, uphold, cherish, and esteem* the marriage estate." (364)

"[Marriage] should also be *kept pure* by all; which means that no whore or adulterer should be found among you, but rather each of you should *have his own wife.*" (364)

"But if for a time you have lived outside of this state in concubinage and led a life of fornication, ah, then *stop it and repent, enter into marriage and henceforth live a married and godly life.* Then you will be doing the right and Christian thing." (364)

"Married people *should not be* fornicators or adulterers and adulteresses." (365)

"We should therefore *thank and praise* God, and we should also *glory over* against the miserable devil and the pope that we have been born of a pure and undefiled marriage bed; for the marriage bed is pure in the sight of God." (365)

"Here our adversaries, the enemies of marriage, must *stop.*" (365)

"You ought to *thank* the almighty, eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you can boast of the ordinance of God and the holy estate of matrimony." (366)

"*Keep* [marriage] and *raise up* your children in the name of God." (366)

"You *don't need to worry* about whether you are condemned by God for it, nor will he judge you for the work's sake; this I know for certain." (366, implied imperative)

"And now, as long as you live, *be confident* in every hour that you are living in an estate which was instituted by God and is pleasing to Him." (366)

"Let us *be proud* of the ordinance of God in which we live, for this God and His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, is and will remain an everlasting God, whereas the pope and his rabble will wither like the grass of the field or quickly vanish away like a bubble." (367)

"Every Christian *should remain* in the estate and calling in which he has been placed by God and *faithfully discharge* its duties." (367)

## **Gospel**

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "We are content to know that we are esteemed by God and his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ." (360)

"God . . . is well pleased with married people." (361)

"I have a gracious God, who is pleased with this ordinance, and who also regards me and blesses me and protects me." (363)

"We have God; he regards us, along with all the angels and heavenly hosts, he also defends us against all the darts of the devil and our adversaries." (363)

"I have a gracious God, who regards me, nourishes me, and protects me." (363)

"I am content that God, my dear Father, sees me and has regard for me." (363)

" [Married people] are blessed, and they have no doubt that they are blessed by God." (363)

"Married people, who are wedded and bear children and live pure wedded lives, will not be judged because of this." (366)

"The fact that you are married, as long as you are a Christian, will be a great glory and honor to you on the last day." (366)

### Acts 9:1-19

Luther's sermon on Revelation 12:7-12 featured 1 instance of the first use, 1 of the second, and 18 of the third.<sup>18</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 13 times, 12 times in relation to the promise of justification, and once in relation to sanctification.

#### First Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "But now look to it that God does not punish you on account of those blasphemers, the monks." (375)

#### Second Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "If you want to possess the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, believe in Christ and you will receive it—not through any kind of good works, whether going on pilgrimage, buying letters of indulgence, fasting hearing Masses, praying the rosary, and whatever kinds of good works we can do. Our works do not accomplish this; they shall not have the honor of earning the forgiveness of sins. 'But,' you say, 'I have been a Carthusian monk for such a long time. I have kept a hard, strict rule; therefore, on this account I will surely receive the forgiveness of sins.' No, not yet! Again you say, 'I have been a barefooted monk for so long. I have fasted, prayed, gone barefoot in sackcloth. Will I not have earned the forgiveness of sins because of this?' No, not yet! Again you say, 'I have been a cathedral canon; therefore, I will surely be saved and receive eternal life.' No, not yet!—and so on for all the other orders and estates under the papacy. Do you hear that, I say? Your [monastic] orders, fasts, and other good works do not accomplish this." (382-383)

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<sup>18</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 58: 370–84.

### Third Use

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "[The word] is the true and genuine relic and holy thing, rightly so-called. *Receive* it, *hear* it, and *believe* it from the heart, and you, too, will become holy, free and rid of sins." (373)

"[The Gospel] is the sermon that the whole world should *hear*, *accept*, and *believe*." (381)

"If you, then, also desire to partake in such heavenly goods as the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, then you must *abandon* your foolish works in which you trust, *hear* the Word of God that preaches faith in Christ to you, and *receive* and *believe* it." (383)

"To remove and to wash away sins belongs to the blood of Christ alone. That is what accomplishes it and washes [us] from sins. That is what I should *believe* in." (384)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "*Take* up the Holy Scriptures or Paul; *hear* and *read* him; *put* the glasses on your nose and *look* at it." (373)

"Such fools [like the monks] should not be tolerated. You lords should some day *find* *courage* to *drive the foolish, mangy monks out of town*, or else you should treat and deal with them in such a way that at least they would be forced to cease their blasphemy and abuse." (374)

"Thus it is also incumbent upon you, my dear lords, to *keep watch* and not to become complacent so that you do not lose the Word for the sake of those mangy, lousy blasphemers of God, the monks." (374)

"Therefore, *keep watch*, my dear lords and friends! Walk in the light while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you' [John 12:35], 'for night is coming, when no work can be done' [John 9:4].'" (374)

"Therefore, let us *hold fast* to the genuine and true relic, the noble and eternal treasure: the Word of God, which was taught, preached, and written down by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of the prophets and apostles." (374)

"*Do not become complacent; hold the Word* in love and esteem." (375)

"*Purge* away the scum, dregs, and leaven [1 Cor. 5:7] of the monks. *Send* them packing; *forbid* them to blaspheme." (375)

" [Paul's former sins] *should not be made* light of or minimized; rather, they *should be made* broad, thick, and large, since in themselves they are indeed thick, fat, and large." (377)

"[The Gospel] is the only sermon that you, Paul, should preach: [salvation] through faith in Me and not through the Law or any kind of works." (381, implied imperative)

"That is what you, Paul, are to preach, and whoever hears, accepts and believes this preaching henceforth receives and shall have the forgiveness of all his sins." (381-382, implied imperative)

"As you value the welfare and salvation of your soul, you should *not accept nor listen* to any kind of doctrine about how to receive the forgiveness of sins outside of Christ, whether the doctrine of the pope or the monks." (382)

"Our Lord God does command good works that should also be done, and it would be good and right to *be engaged in good works continually*." (383)

"All sorts of good works toward our neighbors *should follow from faith*: diligently and faithfully *considering* and *attending* to our calling, in accordance with our station; *hearing* and *proclaiming* God's Word; *calling* upon God and *thanking* Him; *fleeing* and *abolishing* idolatry and false worship; *being obedient* to the authorities; *properly managing* house and home, wife, children and servants, and *raising* them in the fear of God; *clothing* the naked; *feeding* the hungry; and whatever other kinds of good works love requires us to show our neighbor." (384)

"This sermon that the holy apostle Paul hears and accepts here—[and] afterward preaches throughout the world—this is what we also should *hear* and *accept*, and *preach* it alone, neither adding to it nor subtracting anything from it." (384)

## Gospel

**Promise for justifying grace.** "[In the Scriptures] you will learn how you are a sinner by nature and where you must become free and rid of your sins and receive eternal life: namely, through faith in Christ." (373)

"Jesus Christ did not come in order to judge and condemn the world, which already had been judged and condemned more than enough on account of its sins; rather, Christ has come to save sinners, which is what He also has commanded His disciples and apostles to preach." (373)

"God has graciously rescued you from [papal] lies and has given you the pure Word of God." (375)

"Christ commanded Paul to preach nothing other than exactly what we preach, namely, faith alone in Christ Jesus, that He is God's Son and that whoever believes in Him will be freed from their sins and be saved. This is the sermon that the whole world should hear, accept, and believe. 'That is the only sermon that you, Paul, should preach: [salvation] through faith in Me and not through the Law or any kind of works.'" (381)

"'Whoever believes in Me' (that I am the true Son of God) 'is righteous before God and will receive eternal life.'" (381)

"Whoever has his sins . . . forgive and blotted out in the name of Jesus Christ, from him the devil and death, who are powerful through sin, have been chased and driven away." (381)

"'Whoever hears, accepts and believes this preaching henceforth receives and shall have the forgiveness of all his sins.' 'Yes, [but] how?' 'Through faith in Me, in Me,' says Christ." (381-382)

"Whoever believes in Christ, God's Son, has a gracious God and the forgiveness of sins,

is transferred out of the devil's kingdom and into the kingdom of God, and will receive eternal life." (382)

"[Ordinary people are] saved out of pure grace and mercy through faith in Christ, who was crucified and died, etc. Faith takes away all misfortune, sin, death, hell, and the wrath of God and makes us heirs of God and of eternal life." (383)

"To be saved and have eternal life is nothing other than to be free from sins. If they are gone, then the pure grace and mercy of God, eternal righteousness and salvation, shower down upon us like snow. That is eternal life." (383)

"To remove and to wash away sins belongs to the blood of Christ alone. That is what accomplishes it and washes [us] from sins." (384)

"For being transferred from darkness into light, from death into life, and receiving the forgiveness of sins and eternal life belongs only,' says Christ, 'to faith in Me. That accomplishes it; nothing else.'" (384)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "These [good works] we do, but not in order to be saved by them, or in pursuit of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, for to acquire this requires something different" (as you have heard), namely, faith in Christ." (384)

#### **Matthew 11:25-30 (1546)**

Luther's 1546 sermon on Matthew 11:25-30 featured 1 instance of the first use, 21 of the second, and 23 of the third.<sup>19</sup> The promises of the gospel were highlighted 5 times, once in relation to the promise of justification, and 4 times in relation to sanctification.

#### **First Use**

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "The [worldly] wise and understanding are condemned everywhere in the Scriptures." (384)

#### **Second Use**

**With reference to the gospel promise of justification.** "God . . . is opposed to the wise and understanding." (383)

"The wise and understanding in the world so contrive things that God cannot be favorable and good to them. For they are always exerting themselves; they do things in the Christian church the way they want to themselves." (384)

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<sup>19</sup>To read this sermon in its entirety, see Luther, *LW*, 51: 383–92.

"Everything that God does they must improve, so that there is no poorer, more insignificant and despised disciple on earth than God; he must be everybody's pupil, everybody wants to be his teacher and preceptor." (384)

"Fanatics and rebels . . . are not satisfied with what God has done and instituted, they cannot let things be as they were ordained to be. They think they have to do something too, in order that they may be a bit better than other people and be able to boast: This is what I have done; what God has done is too poor and insignificant, even childish and foolish; I must add something to it." (384)

"So it is with our Lord God in the world, whatever he institutes and ordains must always be not only perverted but also reviled and discredited by the devil and his followers. And when the world even thinks that God should be pleased and look with approval upon the fact that every fool wants to master and rule him." (385)

"Conceit keeps the dance going. They imagine that because they are in the government and are higher-ups they must surely be wise. And one such fool in counsel hinders the others from getting on with anything at all; for he wants to be wise by force in the devil's name, and still he is a fool." (386)

"Now, if in worldly affairs one is quite rightly opposed to these people who want to be wise and are not, how much more irksome are these people, whom both God and men rightly dislike, who want to be wise in the holy Christian church and are not. For these people hinder the ministry, so that the people cannot come to God." (386)

"[Christ] is opposed to the wiseacres, he will not tolerate them in his Christian church, whether they be pope, emperors, kings, princes, or learned men, because they want to make themselves masters of this divine Word and with their own wisdom rule in the high, great matters of faith and our salvation." (387)

"They think that, because they sit at the top of the government, they are the wisest, that they see more deeply into the Scriptures than other people. Therefore God brings them to terrible destruction; for he will not and cannot, nor should he, tolerate it. And so he brings it to pass that the gospel remains hidden from the high and the wise, and he rules his church quite differently from what they think and understand, even though they imagine they know and understand everything and that, because they are in the government, God cannot get along with their counsel and rule." (387)

"[Christ's] annoyance and displeasure comes from the fact that these miserable, foolish people presume to become masters of the divine Majesty." (387)

"The devil so resides these people that all they want from the Holy Scriptures and God's Word is a big name and their own praise and honor, and they want to be more than other people." (388)

"[The wise and understanding] vex [God] greatly; they mangle the sacrament and the church, and set themselves up in God's place and want themselves to be masters." (391)

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "This is the nature of the shameful wisdom of the world, especially in the Christian church, where one bishop and one pastor hacks and snaps at another and one obstructs and shoves the other, as we have seen at all times in the government of the church to its great detriment." (384)

"These are the real wiseacres, of whom Christ is speaking here, who put the cart before the horse and will not stay on the road which God himself has shown us, but always have to have and do something special in order that the people may say: Ah, our pastor or preacher is nothing; there's the real man, he'll get things done!" (384)

"A few people are often endowed with great wisdom and understanding, unlike ordinary people. Often God gives us a fine, noble, intelligent man, who could serve principalities and people with wisdom and counsel. But such persons flee from the business of government and it is hard to bring them to govern." (385)

"On the other hand, however, there are others who want to be [in government], but they have no ability. In worldly government these are called jackanapes and wiseacres. These fellows are inveighed against and we are quite rightly hostile to them; everybody mourns the fact that we can never be safe from these fools, for they are good for nothing and they do nothing but put flies in the ointment. That's why the people say of them: The devil has slobbered us with fools." (385)

"But this cannot be achieved with the world. The sectarians rise up and at bottom seek nothing else except to gain great honor among the people, so that people will say of them: There's the right man; he'll do it! And with this praise they also want to strut and tickle their own vanity: This you have done, this is your work, you are the first-rate man, the real master. But that isn't even worth throwing to the dogs." (388)

"This is the plague which still continues to cling to us—that we want to be wise and understanding in the devil's name." (389)

"In times past we would have run to the ends of the world if we had known of a place where we could have heard God speak. But now that we hear this every day in sermons, indeed, now that all books are full of it, we do not see this happening." (390)

"Oh, people say, what is that? After all, there is preaching every day, often many times every day, so that we soon grow weary of it. What do we get out of it?" (390)

"But aren't we stupid and crazy, yes, blinded and possessed by the devil? There sits the decoy duck in Rome with his bag of tricks luring to himself the whole world with its money and goods, and all the while anybody can go to baptism, the sacrament, and the pulpit! How highly honored and richly blessed we are to know that God speaks with us and feeds us with his Word, gives us his baptism, the keys [absolution], etc.! But these barbarous, godless people say: What, baptism, sacrament, God's Word?—Joseph's pants, that's what does it! It is the devil in the world who makes the high personages, the emperor and the kings, oblivious such things and causes them to allow themselves to be so grossly duped and fooled and be spattered with filth by these first-class rascals and liars, the pope and his tonsured shavelings." (391)

### **Third Use**

**With reference to the gospel promise of sanctification.** "Here *we ought to say*: Dear heavenly Father, speak thou, I am willing to be a fool and a child and be silent; for if I were to rule with my own understanding, wisdom, and reason, the cart would long since have been stuck in the mire and the ship would long since have been wrecked." (388)

"Right preachers should diligently and faithfully *teach* only the Word of God and *seek* only his honor and praise." (388)

"Likewise, the hearers also should *say*: I do not believe in my pastor, but he tells me of another Lord, whose name is Christ; him he shows to me; I will *listen* to him, in so far as he leads me to the true Teacher and Master, God's Son." (388)

"None other should be *preached* or *taught* except the Son of God alone." (388, implied imperative)

"Therefore this is what I *say*: I grant that emperor, pope, cardinals, princes, and nobles are wise and understanding, but I *shall believe* in Christ; he is the one God bids me to listen to, from him he bids me to learn what real, divine wisdom and understanding is." (388, implied imperative)

"I will gladly listen to you so far as secular government is concerned, but when you presume to be master in Christendom and claim power to determine what I should believe and do, this I will not accept, for then you are claiming to be wise and understanding at the point where you are a fool and nothing has been revealed to you." (389, implied imperatives)

"For here is the Lord, who is the only one *we ought to hear* in these matters." (389)

"So, if it is his Word you hold up to me and command, *I shall gladly accept it*, even though it be spoken by a little child, or even the ass that spoke to Balaam [Num. 22:21-30]." (389, implied imperative)

"To combat this we must *learn* what this means: 'All things have been delivered to [Christ].'" (389)

"Therefore Christ says, "All things have been delivered to me," that is, to me you must *be obedient*. If you have my Word, then *stick to it*, and *pay no attention* to anybody who teaches and commands you differently." (390)

"Let the pope, emperor, the mighty, and the learned be wise; but *don't you follow them*, even though they were a thousand times wiser than they are." (390)

"*Don't you do* what even an angel in heaven dare not do, take over the sovereignty and the power of being wise yourself or exercising power and rule in God's government." (390)

"I have made the whole world and all nations your possession; *hear* [Christ] you kings and lords, if you would be wise; *do homage* to him as your Lord; and know that what he says to you I am saying to you." (390)

"This we Christians should *learn* and *acknowledge*, even though the world does not want to do it, and we should *be grateful* to God that he has so richly blessed us and granted that we ourselves are able to hear him, just as Christ himself here gives joyful thanks to his heavenly Father." (390)

"You *ought to lift up your hands* and *rejoice* that we have been given the honor of hearing God speaking to us through his Word." (390)

"*We should listen* to God's Word, which tells us that he is our schoolmaster, and have nothing to do with Joseph's pants or the pope's juggling tricks." (391)

"To such all the angels in heaven and all Christians are opposed and *we should say* to them: If you want to teach Christ to me, I shall gladly listen to you, otherwise not, even if you were an angel from heaven, as St. Paul says in Gal. 1 [:8]." (391)

"When, therefore, the great lords, the emperor, pope, cardinals, and bishops are hostile and wrathful toward us because of all this, excommunicate us, and would gladly burn and murder us all, *we must suffer* it and *say*: We did not start this on account of the pope, the bishops, and the princes, nor shall we stop it on account of them." (391)

"Christ says, "*Come* to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden" [Matt. 11:28], and it is as though he were saying: *Just stick to me, hold on to my Word and let everything else go.*" (391)

"If you are burdened and beheaded for it, then *have patience*, I will make it so sweet for you that you easily would be able to bear it." (391)

"Only *come to me*; and if you are facing oppression, death, or torture, because the pope, the Turk, and emperor are attacking you, *do not be afraid*; it will not be too heavy for you, but light and easy to bear, for I give you the Spirit, so that the burden, which for the world would be unbearable, becomes for you a light burden." (392)

"Let misfortune, sin, death, and whatever the devil and the world loads upon you assail and assault you, if only you *remain confident and undismayed, waiting* upon the Lord in faith, you have already won, you have already escaped death and far surpassed the devil and the world." (392)

"Lo, this means that the wise of this world are rejected, that we may learn not to think ourselves wise and to put away from our eyes all great personages, indeed, to *shut our eyes* altogether, and *cling* only to Christ's Word and *come* to him, as he so lovingly invites us to do, and *say*: Thou alone are my beloved Lord and Master, I am thy disciple." (392)

## Gospel

**Promise for justifying grace.** "You have already won, you have already escaped death and far surpassed the devil and the world." (392)

**Promise for sanctifying grace.** "Christ says . . . 'I will rule, protect, and save you well.'" (390)

"If you are burdened and beheaded for it, then have patience, I will make it so sweet for you that you easily would be able to bear it." (391)

"If things go badly, I will give you the courage even to laugh about it; and if even though you walk on fiery coals, the torment shall nevertheless not be so severe and the devil shall nevertheless not be so bad, and you will rather feel that you are walking on roses." (392)

"I give you the Spirit, so that the burden, which for the world would be unbearable, becomes for you a light burden." (392)

## APPENDIX 2

### ADDITIONAL SERMON ANALYSIS FROM *LUTHER'S WORKS*

Further analysis of an additional fifty-five sermons from *Luther's Works* presents a more comprehensive picture of Luther's law-gospel paradigm. Table A1 reveals analyses from an additional six sermons from Luther's early years. Table A2 reveals data from an additional fifteen sermons from his mid-career. Table A3 categorizes thirty-four additional sermons from his final years. Table A4 presents total findings from all the sermons in appendix 2. Figure A1 depicts these uses of the law graphically as a percentage of the whole. The data herein is relatively consistent with the analyses presented in the dissertation body, and thus serves to bolster the claims presented therein.

Table A1. Luther's early sermons (1510-1521)

<i>Text</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>LW</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>1st Use</i>	<i>2nd Use</i>	<i>3rd Use</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
Luke 18:9-14	Sermon on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity	6/27/1516	51, 14-16	1, 52	--	10	7	--
Matt 8:23-27	Sermon on the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany	2/1/1517	51, 23-26	1, 128-130	1	7	1	2
John 9:1-38	Sermon on the Man Born Blind	3/17/1518	51, 35-43	1, 267-273	1	13	14	8
John 11:1-45	Sermon on the Raising of Lazarus	3/19/1518	51, 44-49	1, 273-277	--	7	13	12
Matt 16:13-19	Sermon Preached in the Castle at Leipzig on the Day of St. Peter and St. Paul	6/29/1519	51, 53-60	2, 244-249	2	12	11	12
John 20:19-20	Sermon Preached at Erfurt on the Journey to Worms	4/7/1521	51, 60-66	7, 808-813	1	15	11	14
Total					5	64	57	48
Average					0.83	10.67	9.50	8.00
Percentage					3.97 %	50.79 %	45.24 %	-----

Table A2. Luther's sermons in mid-career (1522-1532)

<i>Text</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>LW</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>1st Use</i>	<i>2nd Use</i>	<i>3rd Use</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
Matt 22:37-39	First Sermon Preached at the Castle in Weimar	10/19/1522	51, 104-110	10 (III), 341-352	--	18	21	9
Matt 22:37-39	Second Sermon Preached at the Castle in Weimar	10/19/1522	51, 111-117	10 (III), 341-352	--	10	17	8
Exodus 20	The Second and Third Commandments	11/30/1528	51, 141-145	30 (I), 1-122	4	5	33	4
Exodus 20	The Fourth Commandment	12/2/1528	51, 145-150	30 (I), 1-122	2	6	28	10
Exodus 20	The Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Commandments	12/4/1528	51, 150-155	30 (I), 1-122	2	8	38	6
Exodus 20	The Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Commandments	12/6/1528	51, 155-161	30 (I), 1-122	7	10	29	6
----	The Creed	12/8/1528	51, 162-169	30 (I), 1-122	--	6	9	9
Matt 6:9-13	On Prayer and the First Three Petitions of the Lord's Prayer	12/10/1528	51, 169-176	30 (I), 1-122	1	9	44	4
Matt 6:9-13	The Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Petitions	12/12/1528	51, 176-182	30 (I), 1-122	1	12	28	9
----	On Baptism	12/14/1528	51, 182-188	30 (I), 1-122	--	5	13	10
----	The Lord's Supper	12/16/1528	51, 188-193	30 (I), 1-122	3	16	33	17
Luke 2:1-14	Sermon on the Afternoon of Christmas Day	12/25/1530	51, 211-218	32, 261-270	--	16	14	14

Table A2 continued

<i>Text</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>LW</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>1st Use</i>	<i>2nd Use</i>	<i>3rd Use</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
2 Cor 3:4-6	Sermon on the Twelfth Sunday After Trinity	8/27/1531	51, 221- 227	34 (II), 156- 165	--	18	3	10
1 Thess 4:13- 18	Second Sermon at the Funeral of the Elector, Duke John of Saxony	8/22/1532	51, 243- 255	36, 237- 270	--	3	18	32
1 Tim 1:5-7	Sermon on the Sum of the Christian Life	11/24/1532	51, 259- 287	36, 352- 375	4	33	38	21
Total					24	175	366	169
Average					1.60	11.67	24.40	11.27
Percentage					4.25%	30.97 %	64.78 %	----

Table A3. Luther's sermons in his final years (1533-1546)

<i>Text</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>LW</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>1st Use</i>	<i>2nd Use</i>	<i>3rd Use</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
2 Cor 6:1-10	Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent	2/23/1539	58, 3-15	47, 666- 669	6	2	16	5
1 Thess 4:1-7	Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent	2/2/1539	58, 16- 29	47, 671- 678	12	14	17	4
John 14:23- 31	Sermon in Castle Pleissenburg, Leipzig	5/24/1539	51, 303- 312	47, 772- 779	--	9	27	10
Matt 3:1-17	First Sermon at the Baptism of Bernard of Anhalt	4/1/1540	58, 33- 49	49, 111- 124	10	14	18	21

Table A3 continued

<i>Text</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>LW</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>1st Use</i>	<i>2nd Use</i>	<i>3rd Use</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
Matt 3:13-17	Sermon at the Baptism of Bernhard Von Anhalt	4/2/1540	51, 315-329	49, 124-135	--	8	25	22
Matt 2:1-12	Sermon for Epiphany	1/6/1544	58, 53-70	49, 294-307	3	11	3	5
Matt 3:13-17	Sermon for the First Sunday After Epiphany	1/13/1544	58, 71-79	49, 308-317	1	6	13	18
---	On Parental Consent to Betrothals	1/20/1544	58, 80-87	49, 318-324	--	11	18	1
1 Cor 15:35-38	First Sermon on the Resurrection of the Dead	5/11/1544	58, 102-118	49, 395-415	--	12	23	26
1 Cor 15:39-44	Second Sermon on the Resurrection of the Dead	5/25/1544	58, 119-132	49, 422-441	--	14	8	24
Rom 8:18-23	Sermon for the Fourth Sunday After Trinity	7/6/1544	58, 164-170	49, 503-510	4	4	7	12
Luke 14:1-11	Sermon at the Dedication of Castle Church, Torgau	10/15/1544	51, 333-354	49, 588-615	4	16	35	9
Luke 2:8-14	Sermon for Christmas Vespers	12/25/1544	58, 192-198	49, 631-651	1	12	9	15
Titus 3:4-5	Afternoon Sermon for St. Stephen's Day	12/26/1544	58, 199-205	49, 631-651	3	4	5	21
Titus 3:4-8	Sermon for the Sunday in Christmastide (The Day of the Holy Innocents)	12/28/1544	58, 206-212	49, 631-651	1	7	11	14

Table A3 continued

<i>Text</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>LW</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>1st Use</i>	<i>2nd Use</i>	<i>3rd Use</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
Rom 12:6	The Second Sunday After the Epiphany	1/18/1545	58, 216-223	49, 681-686	1	10	12	2
1 Pet 2:11-20	Sermon for the Third Sunday After Easter	4/26/1545	58, 225-232	49, 716-723	8	5	23	13
1 Cor 15:51-53	Third Sermon on the Resurrection of the Dead	5/10/1545	58, 133-147	49, 727-746	8	8	13	21
John 5:39	A Sermon on the Glorious Passage from John 5, "Search the Scriptures!"	8/5/1545	58, 246-258	51, 1-11	4	13	10	24
Luke 19:41-48	Sermon for the Rededication of the Church of St. Paul in Leipzig	8/12/1545	58, 263-280	51, 22-41	4	28	9	16
Gal 5:16-24	Sermon for the Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity	9/6/1545	58, 283-293	51, 50-57	3	23	13	5
Eph 5:15-20	Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday After Trinity	10/18/1545	58, 295-302	51, 60-67	10	33	32	8
Phil 1:3-11	Sermon for the Twenty-Second Sunday After Trinity	11/1/1545	58, 314-321	51, 76-81	3	5	9	12
Phil 3:17-21	Sermon for the Twenty-Third Sunday After Trinity	11/8/1545	58, 323-330	51, 82-87	1	13	11	19
Col 1:3-14	Sermon for the Twenty-Fourth Sunday After Trinity	11/15/1545	58, 334-339	51, 87-90	--	13	5	8

Table A3 continued

<i>Text</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>LW</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>1st Use</i>	<i>2nd Use</i>	<i>3rd Use</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
1 Cor 4:1-5	Sermon for the Third Sunday in Advent	12/13/1545	58, 342- 347	51, 96- 99	1	5	13	5
1 John 4:16- 21	Sermon for the First Sunday After Trinity	06/07/1545	58, 233- 241	49, 780- 87	6	16	28	8
Matt 3:13- 17	A Sermon of Dr. Martin Luther Delivered in Halle on the Day of Christ's Epiphany	1/6/1546	58, 357- 369	51, 107- 117	--	9	21	24
Titus 3:4-8	Afternoon Sermon for the First Sunday After Epiphany	1/10/1546	58, 388- 396	51, 118- 123	2	14	4	26
Rom 12:3	The Last Sermon in Wittenberg	1/17/1546	51, 371- 380	51, 123- 134	4	9	18	3
Matt 8:23- 27	Sermon on the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday After Epiphany	1/31/1546	58, 411- 428	51, 148- 163	--	18	11	25
Luke 2:22- 32	For the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple	2/2/1546	58, 429- 441	51, 164- 173	4	12	24	12
Matt 13:24- 30	For the Fifth Sunday After Epiphany	2/7/1546	58, 442- 459	51, 174- 196	--	30	51	23
Total					105	411	557	467
Average					3.09	12.09	16.38	13.74
Percentage					9.79%	38.30%	51.91%	----

Table A4. Luther's sermons in appendix 2

<i>Appendix Sermons</i>	<i>1st Use</i>	<i>2nd Use</i>	<i>3rd Use</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
Total	134	650	980	684
Average	2.4	11.8	17.8	12.4
Percentage	7.60%	36.85%	55.56%	----

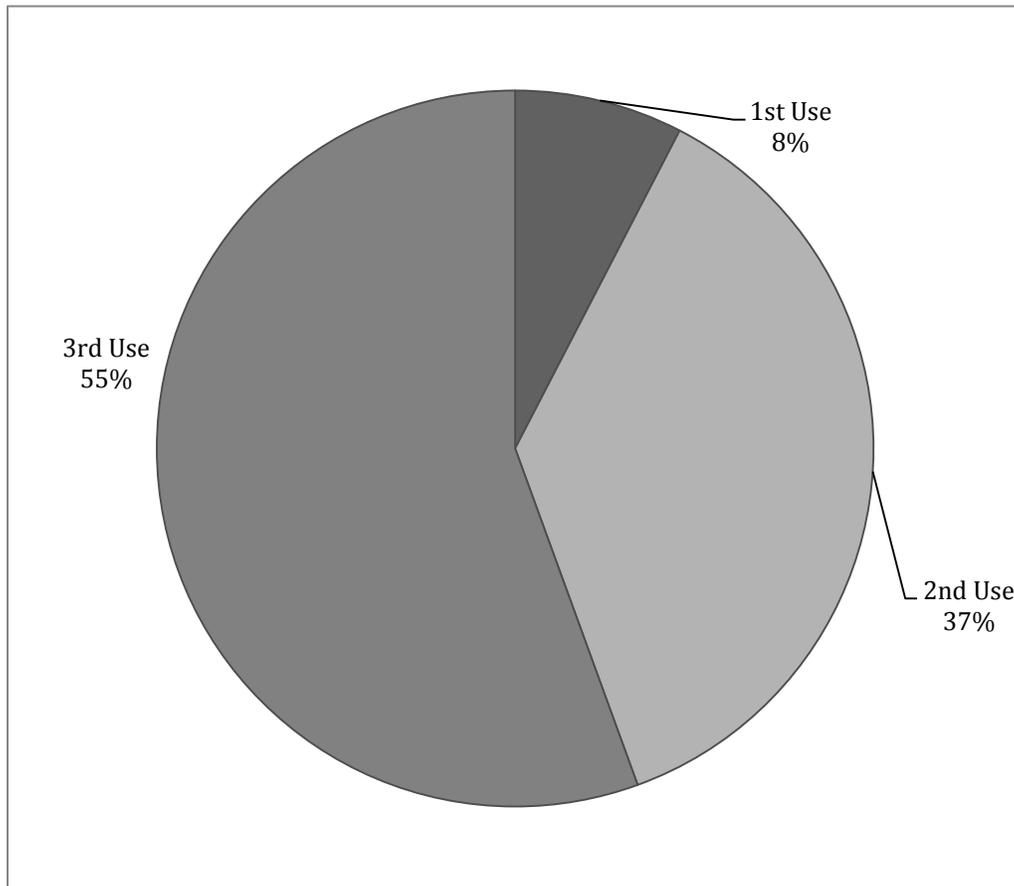


Figure A1. *Usus Legis* in appendix 2

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## ABSTRACT

### LUTHER AND THE DEADLY BE'S: HIS CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING IN CONTRAST TO REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL EXCLUSIVISM

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015  
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Redemptive-historical preaching has incredible value to strengthen the preacher's arsenal, but its more radical proponents often resort to unyielding exclusivism, labeling non-conformist sermons as sub-Christian or worse. These exclusivistic leanings inevitably result in an unintended castigation of many faithful preachers throughout church history. Even a preacher like Martin Luther, with a near-universal reputation for Christ-centeredness, is unable to survive this redemptive-historical gauntlet unscathed. This dissertation contends that Martin Luther's preaching fails to satisfy redemptive-historical standards for Christ-centered preaching, thereby suggesting those standards may be too narrow. The law-gospel paradigm in Luther's Christ-centered homiletic may function as a corrective to the potential overreach among redemptive-historical exclusivists.

Certain criteria suggest Luther's preaching fails to satisfy redemptive-historical standards. Bryan Chapell offers a succinct and well-tested litmus test for redemptive-historical sermons in his important work, *Christ-Centered Preaching*. Chapell outlines three types of non-redemptive sermons, aptly labeled "Deadly Be's:" (1) "Be Like" messages, which urge hearers to follow a Bible character's example, (2) "Be Good" sermons, which call hearers to obedience, and (3) "Be Disciplined" messages, which compel hearers towards greater diligence. Chapell's "Deadly Be's" will be used to

measure Luther's redemptive-historical compliance.

Chapter 1 introduces the main research problem and the thesis. Chapter 2 further introduces redemptive-historical preaching and its potential for exclusivism. Chapter 3 establishes Martin Luther as a potential corrective to the exclusivistic leanings of redemptive-historical preaching. Chapter 4 explores Luther's homiletical distinctives, with particular attention given to his law-gospel paradigm. Chapter 5 analyzes four sermons of the early Luther. Chapter 6 analyzes six sermons from Luther's preaching in mid-career. Chapter 7 investigates six sermons from Luther's preaching in his final years. Chapter 8 summarizes the basic principles gleaned from Luther's practices in an attempt to present a homiletical methodology for preaching Christ more effectively. Chapter 9 summarizes the main research problem and the effectiveness of Luther's preaching as a potential corrective. In many ways, his preaching both spawned and saved the Reformation. Those who desire to preach Christ more effectively should seriously reckon with his unique contribution to homiletics.

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